

Seeds for a community garden beginning to sprout

By Garry Bowen

On Dec. 14, upon the first seating of South Lake Tahoe's newly-elected City Council, a quiet anniversary one day shy of a year was commemorated by a rather quiet submission, that of a project proposal regarding a Community Garden for South Shore.

As there was quite a lot of commotion that day, what with employment anniversaries of 5, 10, 20 years or more, a retiring police lieutenant, and swearing in ceremonies of all sorts, a quiet submission, especially when submitted during the Public Comment period [additionally obscured by being the only portion not televised], needs further comment.

In mid-December 2009, a meeting was convened at Embassy Suites among a few key folks in town, in which agreement was reached within an hour-and-a-half to begin a pilot composting program [technically known as food waste diversion] with Embassy Suites, South Tahoe Refuse, both Marriotts, and later, Aramark, on board. The "silent" partner in that endeavor was Full Circle Compost over the hill in Minden, as a repository for nearly 5-plus cubic yards accumulated per week, "percolating" into compost on a large scale to benefit South Shore culinary interests, and the health and well-being of constituents.



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Diverting food waste from a lengthy trip to the landfill is a commendable thing to do in any event, but the quiet submission of the above mentioned proposal will mean much more to the city's future if enough attention is paid, as there was always to be a second, more substantial stage – that of creating fresh, vibrant, and natural produce.

After almost a year-and-a-half of due diligence, a plan has evolved that is readily capable of growing significant amounts of fresh and natural produce for the South Shore populace, using a moderately priced facility designed for high altitude, low temperature climates like ours. In addition, as it is a geodesic dome designed as a passive solar structure, there is a good possibility we will not have to engage any public utility, as all resources are in effect “renewable”. This makes it a totally sustainable project, which includes “paying its’ own way” counter to the usual Tahoe bane, operation and maintenance.

Lastly, it is the opening “salvo” of a facilitated project of the City's Sustainable Action Plan, in this case Item No. 9, Healthy Food Systems, a worthy place to start implementing necessary change. As nutritional energy is the most important ingredient to most any endeavor that people do, any function that allows all inhabitants, whether residing or visiting, to benefit, is comprehensive. Adding additional components of education, companionship, and use as a “community gathering place”, all of which can be done “year-round” [the latter two are requisite to the dictates of Item No. 9], is the best that can be offered for less than six figures.

Benefiting all layers of the community at once is the best introduction to sustainability, and need not involve any impediments to “normal” progress, stilted as it sometimes seems to be. The community only needs to know that this project is ready, willing, and able to perform in a relatively

short time-span, given the now year-old “ramp-up”.

At the beginning of the year and the decade, we can only hope that this is but one comprehensive example of a proactive, self-sustaining civic entrepreneurial project, the success of which will lead to many others in the realm of sustainability. South Shore, the region, and the Earth will all be better off.

If there is an interest in either the Primer submitted to council, or the impending Strategic Business Plan, use the contact information below to comment or request an electronic copy.

Garry Bowen has a 50-year connection to the South Shore, with an immediate past devoted to global sustainability, on most of its current fronts: green building, energy and water efficiencies, and public health. He's also in the process of planning with his classmates their 50-year South Tahoe High reunion. He may be reached at tahoefuture@gmail.com or (775) 690.6900.