

Homewood ski area proposals divide W. Shore community

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – Art Chapman is a man who knows what he wants. What he wants is to turn Homewood Mountain Resort into a profitable year-round destination.

What locals want is a mixed bag. Thirty-three people spoke at a public hearing Feb. 23 before the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. It was split between those who want the West Shore community to stay as it is and those who want it revitalized; with a few in the middle.

The 2,000-page draft environmental impact statement and environmental impact report for the resort are out for public comment. At Wednesday's meeting it was revealed this period has been extended to a total of 90 days, with the cutoff being April 21.

Six alternatives are proposed. One is to close the ski resort if the figures don't pencil out to make a profit.

Chapman is president and chairman of JMA Ventures, the San Francisco company that bought Homewood in summer 2006. At that time the 1,400-acre resort with 1,260 skiable acres was losing money under the ownership of pistachio farmer Jeff Yurosek. Chapman said he planned to turn the ledger black.



JMA President

Art Chapman
wants to turn
Homewood into
a viable ski
resort.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

He hasn't.

Homewood, Chapman told the Governing Board, has lost nearly \$5 million from 2006 to 2009. An auditor has not verified the negative 2010 figures so he is not releasing those.

To make a profit, the resort needs to attract an average of 700 skiers a day during the week. That would be an increase of 400 a day, Chapman said.

JMA wants to build 99 residential units, a 75-room hotel, have underground parking for lodging and a parking structure for day use, replace two lifts – one with a gondola, and build a mid-mountain day lodge.

Talking one-on-one with *Lake Tahoe News*, Chapman said the project could start in 2013, would be completed in two phases over five years, would require one season of limited skiing, and would provide 180 year-round jobs.

He anticipates full-time residents occupying the housing units.

The 15,000-square-foot of retail would include a deli, ice cream parlor and hardware store. Chapman said that is what residents requested. The day lodge will come with a pool for the community. Opening the mountain to hiking and improving the bike trail in the area are also on the table.

What concerns many who spoke in opposition to the development is the size of the project and how it may change the look and

feel of this area on Highway 89 that is nearly right on Lake Tahoe. Many also don't believe the stats provided about air quality and how vehicle miles traveled will be reduced. Concern about the height of the structures was also brought up. Creating light pollution in an area that provides unobstructed views to the Milky Way was another concern.

After the public had its say, the Governing Board echoed some of those concerns and asked for answers. (Board member Claire Fortier, who represents South Lake Tahoe, left before hearing public comment because of a commitment she said she had before being appointed to the TRPA board.)



Developers want the proposed amphitheater to be the permanent home to the Lake Tahoe Music Festival.

Board member Casey Beyer was perplexed by how the TRPA measures height.

Executive Director Joanne Marchetta replied, "The way we measure height we compare apples to televisions. There is great room for misunderstanding."

The controversy is when a structure is built on a slope. Instead of measuring from the foundation to the roof at each

spot, height is essentially calculated by the lowest point to the highest point.

Board member Byron Sher carried forward the public's concern about the amendments and code changes that would be required. His contention is codes need to be changed and then the project brought to the board.

Colleague Nancy McDermid told him that isn't possible. She learned this in her four years on the Douglas County Planning Commission. She said it's impossible to know what building codes will be in 10 years, so the rules need to continue to be tweaked to keep up with the times.

Marchetta explained this property straddles three plan area statements that are "old and disjointed."

"A lot of the amendments are to address inconsistencies made 2½ decades ago when we didn't know what this ski area would be," Marchetta said.

Friends of the West Shore is a group opposed to the development. The organization is conducting a survey to see what people have to say about the developer's plan.

The League to Save Lake Tahoe sent a press release Feb. 18 stating its opposition as well as having a representative speak Wednesday.

Amanda Royal, spokeswoman for the League, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting that ended at 4:35pm, it's possible some project at Homewood would work, but not this one. She said the League's focus is on making sure the thresholds TRPA is mandated to uphold are not violated.

Even though economics was a common theme throughout the day, Royal said that is not a threshold and therefore is not a concern of the League's.

The League's release said, "In the past several years, the

TRPA has changed course dramatically to a piecemeal approach to planning at Tahoe. Projects are negotiated on a case-by-case basis. The process is clearly flawed as it has produced several projects that have received stunning exceptions to Tahoe's rules. Each irresponsible project sets the stage for more irresponsible projects down the road, creating an unpredictable system that overall endangers Tahoe's unique ecological values."

Board member Shelly Aldean seemed to pick up on this sentiment when she asked whether staff had looked at other projects in the works or was this an isolated analysis.

The answer by TRPA staff was they look at funded and unfunded projects.

"I would think then the improvement at Fanny Bridge should have been included," Aldean said.

The bridge in Tahoe City is a choke point for traffic. However, seismic and other concerns require it to be replaced, which will also come with realignment. None of this is in the environmental documents.

A copy of the draft EIS/EIR is available on the TRPA's website.