

South Tahoe on path to change how it does business

By Kathryn Reed

A blueprint for how South Lake Tahoe will conduct business is taking shape, with adoption of the formal strategic plan expected at the March 1 council meeting.

The City Council spent about 90 minutes last week creating substance for the five priorities the group agreed to at the prior meeting.



Besides what the council envisions for the area, City Manager Tony O'Rourke is doing his own assessments that are designed to complement the policy the City Council is formulating.

Also at the March 1 meeting will be O'Rourke's reorganization plan for the city.

"We need to right size the government to match resources," O'Rourke said.

What positions will be eliminated and the cost savings are not being made public. Part of the secrecy is the need to discuss matters with unions. *Lake Tahoe News* has been told the cuts will be at various levels, not just rank and file employees.

O'Rourke told the council during the workshop portion of the Feb. 8 meeting under the Fiscal Sustainability section that change is coming. The plan calls for looking at "shifting city's employee compensation system from a longevity-based step plan to a pay-for-performance system that rewards results."

He said, "We are just paying people to show up and I don't think that's our goal. We have good employees. We need to recognize them."

Nancy Kerry, who works in the Housing and Redevelopment Department, has been assisting O'Rourke with the intricacies of the strategic plan.

Another thing O'Rourke is looking at is how the city delivers services. He is considering privatizing some of the city's resources such as the ice arena.

"We don't have to be the direct provider of services," O'Rourke told the council.

The council agreed the goal should be for the Parks and Recreation Department to cover 75 percent of its costs instead of the current 50 percent. Stan Sherer, who has been at the helm of the department for six weeks, is assessing how best and who best to operate entities under his authority.

"We need to be more entrepreneurial in how we invest in Bijou (Golf Course). Maybe we need more special events," Councilwoman Angela Swanson said.

At the start of the meeting the council agreed to the city's mission statement being, "We are dedicated to providing essential, outstanding and cost-effective services that enhance the vitality and quality of life our residents, businesses and guests."

Within the five categories of the plan are strategies to achieve the goal and performance measures.

Under Economic Development, the goal is to adopt the Tahoe Valley Community Plan by the end of the year, increase hotel tax collections by two percentage points next fiscal year, increase business licenses from 3,000 to 3,150, and increase hotel occupancy rate from 23 percent to 32 percent.

O'Rourke said he had been meeting with stakeholders "to discuss what is the community brand."

He added, "There are not enough events celebrating the natural environment."

Councilwoman Claire Fortier said it's important for the city to support events even if they are not city-initiated events.

Under fiscal matters, Councilman Bruce Grego believes the city needs look at going back to voters to increase the business license fee even though it failed at the ballot in November.

Councilman Tom Davis strongly disagreed. He said there is no appetite for such a fee no matter how much the public is educated. He said his Tahoe Keys vacation rental business would have gone from paying \$3,800 a year to \$10,000 had the measure passed.

"If we are going to go to the public, it should be for more than \$150,000," O'Rourke said. That's all the fee change would have generated.

When it came to the Built Environment, O'Rourke praised Mayor Hal Cole's sign near the airport welcoming people, saying more things like that are needed in town.

The idea is to improve things like landscaping, plant flowers, and make Linear Park near Tahoe Meadows be visually appealing.

One of the strategies is to create a rating system in conjunction with the lodging and visitors bureaus for hotel properties that would encourage owners to enhance their establishments so they are at the top of the list.

A performance measure for this category is to add two business improvement districts in 2011-12 to what Ski Run Boulevard has established.

Providing a 24-hour online and voicemail service was proposed

as a way to better get input from the public, with the idea people will get a response within 24 hours.

Playing nicer with everyone keeps being reiterated. The idea of the council having annual meetings with various boards was broached. Ironically, Douglas County Commissioner Lee Bonner spoke at the start of the regular council meeting saying his board wants to set up a meeting soon with the council to discuss matters of importance regarding the South Shore that cross the state line.

Next up is for the council is to adopt the plan. Then staff will start implementing it. The council will be provided quarterly reports, with an annual progress report created for the public, although the quarterly documents would be public documents.

Although the strategic plan is a bit of a living document, it is designed to be a vision for the next four years.

From the strategic plan, the business plan will be developed. That should be before the council in April. That in turn will drive what the budget looks like. For the first time in at least a decade, if ever, the city plans to create a five-year budget.