

Opinion: Detailing importance of S. Tahoe's General Plan

By Tony O'Rourke

On May 3, the South Lake Tahoe City Council will host a public hearing and work session on the city's General Plan update. On May 17, the City Council is scheduled to consider adopting the General Plan update and final environmental impact report. This is an exciting time for the city as it nears completion of adopting the community's vision following a three-year process of gathering community input, developing ideas, evaluating environmental impacts and concerns and considering alternatives.



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The city of South Lake Tahoe's 2030 General Plan update sets a new direction for how the community plans, manages, and implements change. The development of the General Plan update is based on the smart growth principles adopted by the City Council in 2005, the Sustainability Plan adopted by the City Council in 2008, as well as the community's vision as expressed in the draft Tahoe Valley Community Plan, Pathway 2007, many General Plan public workshops and community input during the process through comments and meetings.

In addition, the drafted General Plan and final environmental impact report includes environmental mitigation measures and an analysis of consistency with standards set by the Tahoe

Regional Planning Agency.

Why do we need a General Plan when we have the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and its Regional Plan?

Every city and county in California is legally required to adopt a General Plan, which serves as a community's constitution for land use and development. The TRPA sets land use policy on a regional scale, but doesn't include specific needs of a community and South Lake Tahoe is our community. While a Regional Plan is important, its mission is to focus on lake clarity, regional developments and environmental thresholds. The city's General Plan goes a step further and focuses on South Lake Tahoe residents' vision, local needs and neighborhoods.

For example, in December 2010, local residents rated the appearance of South Lake Tahoe among the lowest in a national survey of 270 cities. The majority of the commercial corridor in South Lake Tahoe is deemed a protected "view corridor" to Lake Tahoe; yet the result of the regulations have left the visual appearance of the community below standard and in need of significant upgrade. While a billion dollars has been invested in lake clarity, which is still declining, the infrastructure and appearance of the city have been neglected.

What is and is not in the General Plan update?

Recently, special interest groups and individuals have written articles summarizing as purported "facts" things in the General Plan that are false and misleading. While the General Plan can be long and arduous reading, it is a public record so one need not argue about what is or is not contained in the plan. For the purpose of fact-setting the following is offered.

What is not in the General Plan:

- The General Plan does not contain a plan for 100 acres of

six-story high-density development as asserted by uninformed sources.

- The city's General Plan does not envision thousands of new condominiums. Given the state of the housing market, it will be many years before the proposed 940 market rate residential housing unit allocations and 222 affordable housing residential allocations would be absorbed into the currently depressed housing market. Any new residential unit (which includes condominiums) requires an allocation of a residential unit of rse (RUU) from the TRPA. The exception to the rule is for affordable housing units, which are restricted to low and moderate income households and do not require an RUU. If you read or hear otherwise, you are being given false or misleading information.

- The General Plan does not utilize eminent domain. The City Council adopted Resolution 2008-16 eliminating eminent domain authority from its purview.

What is in the General Plan:

- The plan focuses on sustainability and contains all policies included in the 2008 City Sustainability Plan. With adoption of the General Plan, the city will continue to be the leader in sustainable policy and practices within the Tahoe basin.

- The plan requires the city to promote "Complete Neighborhoods" that provide resident amenities, such as walking and biking trails and enhance neighborhood identity. These amenities have been suggested by special interest environmental groups as projects that would result in a better place to live and visit, which will provide great opportunities for collaboration.

- The plan requires incorporation of policies into community plans and an allowance of up to 70 percent land coverage on specifically-designated properties within areas that are already developed as higher density commercial hubs.

- The plan promotes removing worn and dilapidated buildings from existing commercial corridor into centralized hubs, which provides opportunity to improve the visual appearance of the city and reduce coverage in sensitive areas by centralizing it into non-sensitive areas. The General Plan requests up to an additional 386,000 square feet of commercial floor area to accomplish this goal.

The city is poised to take this opportunity to complete the process of developing a 20-year vision for the future through adoption of a comprehensive General Plan. The City thanks the community for their input into the Plan. The City's General Plan Update and recently adopted Strategic Plan will help to ensure the beauty of our natural environment is not undermined by our built environment.

Tony O'Rourke is city manager of South Lake Tahoe.