

Opinion: Keep Tahoe blue-blooded

By Claire Fortier

The Nevada Legislature's frustration at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is not only understandable. It's timely.

The TRPA should be called out to explain its archaic and cumbersome bureaucracy that costs local residents and developers too much time, aggravation and money.

Unfortunately, that's only part of the real problem at Lake Tahoe.

Changing the "just say no" culture of the TRPA is the reason I chose to sit on the TRPA Governing Board. And finally that seems possible. The TRPA has an executive director and a governing board who understand that real environmental solutions at the lake require replacing our aging 1950's infrastructure, not sealing our communities in a regulatory time capsule.

The problem is that "environmental" advocates, like the League to Save Lake Tahoe, are demonstrating that it's not about keeping Tahoe blue. It's about keeping Tahoe mired in needless litigation and regulatory muck.

In the past few weeks, the League has shown its true colors as an obstructionist organization bent on stopping any change at the lake, even change for the environmental good.

In the eleventh hour, as an excellent and environmentally sensitive project was to come before the TRPA Governing Board, it appears that "environmental" advocates convinced California Gov. Jerry Brown to replace a moderate governing board member with a League colleague.

The replacement, from what we know thus far, is attorney Clem Shute. Mr. Shute has a long history with the League.

It was Mr. Shute who represented the League to block the TRPA Regional Plan in 1985. As he states in his bio, he had "extensive involvement in Lake Tahoe issues including drafting revisions to the 1980 Tahoe Regional Planning Compact and representation of environmental groups in litigation which enjoined development contrary to the Compact."

In that sentence alone, Mr. Shute represents just why the League is an obstructionist organization. That suit tied the Regional Plan process up for years. While I'm sure Mr. Shute is eminently qualified to serve on the TRPA Governing Board, his past relationship with the League is concerning given the League's new litigation posture against TRPA.

Is it a coincidence that the League would tap Mr. Shute at a time when the governing board is desperately trying to get a new Regional Plan approved, a plan more than seven years in the making? And a plan that has been blocked on every front by the League?

Last week, in another 11th hour move, the League showed just how unwilling it is to be part of solution. Through a law firm renown for its environmental litigation history, the League sent a letter to the city raising objections to the city's general plan. That plan, almost four years in the making, was to come before the council for final this month.

Why after all the public forums and opportunities to comment on the city's general plan, did the League decide to do so at the last minute? And why did they choose to do so through an attorney's memo and not through established lines, thus ensuring cooperation, not antagonism?

In the letter, the League states that there "is no reasonable assurance that a new Regional Plan anytime in the near future." Why? Certainly the TRPA Governing Board is committed

to getting a Regional Plan approved. Could it be because the League doesn't want the Regional Plan adopted?

So many of the problems that are preventing this community from both improving lake clarity and its economic bottom line lay squarely with the organization that purports to Save Lake Tahoe.

As a member of the TRPA Governing Board, I take very seriously the need to preserve and protect this beautiful lake for generations to come. I also believe it is equally imperative to have planned environmental redevelopment that not only keeps the lake blue, but keeps the community green, environmentally and economically. I believe that the TRPA is capable of doing so with strong leadership and focused vision.

But it's time to call the League on its misguided efforts. Is the League's real mission to save Lake Tahoe or save the Tahoe of 50 years ago? Is the League, which is primarily comprised of wealthy second homeowners from San Francisco, really keeping Tahoe blue or just keeping Tahoe blue blood?

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