

Private parking company axed, S. Tahoe to take over

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By Kathryn Reed

The term “parking Nazis” for the people charged with patrolling the lot at the Village Center near Stateline will have to be retired now that South Lake Tahoe is severing its agreement with High Sierra Patrol.

Since the reorganization at the city, staff has been delving into why the parking garage at Heavenly Village is losing money and what various contracts say.



A kinder, gentler approach to parking at the Village Center near Stateline is coming. Photo/LTN

Truth is the garage is not losing money, city officials revealed April 19. It's breaking even. It's the enforcement across the street at the private Village Center that is taking a toll on keeping expenses in line. City officials are going to separate the two entities – as they admit should have been

done at the time contracts were signed in 2002.

As with many contracts signed in that era, the one that says the city must provide enforcement at what was called Crescent V Center near Stateline essentially goes on for perpetuity. High Sierra also had contracts with the city starting before 2000 to patrol various locations in the city.

The odd thing about High Sierra Patrol being able to cite people is the 2000-01 El Dorado County Grand Jury report criticized the city for using the private company. At the time, the city said it would go back to using employees for parking enforcement. That policy did not last long.

Terry Hackett, who owns the Village Center, got the city to pay for the enforcement after convincing the powers that be that people using the Heavenly gondola and those shopping or eating at Heavenly Village would clutter his lot in an attempt to avoid paying to park across the street.

Hackett told *Lake Tahoe News* on April 20 that when he is in town next month he plans to discuss various aspects of the parking issue with city officials, including how long people can park, communication between enforcers and the public, and the implementation of things.

The nastiness between patrons and parking enforcers has gone on for nine years, with residents riled up at parking hearings, locals and visitors writing scathing letters to the media, and the city earning another black eye.

Much of the consternation had to deal with High Sierra telling people they could not cross the street if they were parked at the Village Center. Arguments erupted. People were upset. It was a public relations nightmare for the city.

With High Sierra out as of the end of May, it means the city will use mostly community resource officers to patrol the area. They will chalk tires, then issue citations if the

person parks for more than two hours. People will not be harassed if they are seen walking across the street. It's all about how long the car is parked, not where the people are.

The city's 2010-11 contract with High Sierra had the company receiving \$85,604 for parking patrol and \$37,730 for snow removal enforcement.

The city will save that money by doing things in-house, which could mean the parking authority breaks even.

"The goal is not to issue more citations," Nancy Kerry, spokeswoman for the city, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the City Council meeting. The city just wants to enforce the rules.

The tickets High Sierra writes cannot be tracked by location even though the contract for each area is unique. This is why the city cannot say how much money was brought in from a particular area.

A third party, JDS, collects the revenue.

"The city can discern based on revenue about two to three tickets a day are written at the Village Center," Kerry said.

From each \$50 parking ticket the city takes in about \$42. The city doesn't see a dime until the appeals process is complete.

One way the city hopes to generate income is by putting in parking meters. The first will go in this summer near Heavenly Village on Bellamy Court. The plan is it will be less expensive to park in those 20 spaces than in the garage.

More paid parking will be added near city beaches in the coming years.

Other items of note:

- The council is expected to decide June 7 on the bids it receives from potential ice rink operators. There was a walk

through April 18 with perspective bidders. One was from within the city, two were groups from the community, and one person from Virginia.

- The two workshops were postponed because the meeting did not end until 5:30pm. The General Plan will be on the regular May 3 agenda, with City Manager Tony O'Rourke giving updates individually to councilmembers before then. If the capital improvement plan does not fit into the May 3 workshop, a special meeting will be called on May 10.

- In order to play fair, the appointments to the city's fiscal sustainability committee won't be made until May 3. This is because two applicants missed the deadline. This means the process is open until April 27.

- The state City Clerk Conference will be hosted by South Lake Tahoe at Embassy Suites April 26-29.