

STPUD booster station plans upset Tahoe Paradise residents

By Kathryn Reed

An industrial facility in a neighborhood on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe has brought cries of concern from people that are being heard by utility district officials.

A last-minute meeting was convened Wednesday night and another one is set for Saturday at 10am at the project site. Residents in the Grizzly Mountain area off North Upper Truckee Road will be able to meet with South Tahoe Public Utility District board members and staff about the booster pump station that is planned for the area.



The proposed booster station on Grizzly Mountain Road may look like this one on Apache Drive. Photo/Provided

At the April 21 public hearing on the issue, one neighbor spoke out against it, while others sat in the audience.

Concerns for many of the residents who have spoken with *Lake Tahoe News* are how the process works, why this location was selected and what the structure will look like.

What irks people is the district was looking at the property last fall, and closed escrow in January after the board approved the \$146,000 purchase at the Jan. 6 meeting. What neighbors want to know is why they weren't informed about STPUD's plans before the land was bought. Many have said it seems meaningless to ask for input now.

John Thiel, principal engineer, acknowledged at Thursday's board meeting he could have done a better job getting the message out – and will next time.

Lynne Paulson, who lives about 400 feet from the proposed site, didn't get noticed about the 30-day comment period because STPUD only sent letters to residents within 300 feet.

(The comment period was supposed to end today, but has been extended to April 25. Comments are being taken on the project – even though the land has been purchased for this use without public input.)

Paulson read the following into the record, “ ... the purchase of the land prior to project review and approval combined with the planned contracting for the pipeline to this location has resulted in the impression that the booster station project is being steam rolled over us. This doesn't provide the transparency and accountability needed for open government processes.”

She intends to submit a more detailed letter in the next three days.

For Russell Paul, who lives directly across from the project site, his voice is filled with frustration.



This is the view from Russell Paul's residence -- the lot where the booster station would go.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

"I just feel they operate under this cloud of the good for all and move forward with projects. You can question their moves, but you can't be part of the process. There is no process," Paul told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He questions whether the lot below him is part stream environmental zone, which would preclude it from being built on.

Thiel, at the meeting, said only a small portion in the back is designated SEZ. He said this view lot has 3,584 feet of allowable coverage, so something much grander could have been built there.

Concessions have been made since the neighbors started making calls to STPUD in the last week or two. Thiel said the building will be smaller. The design will look more like a residence than what was originally planned. Initially, the district wanted it to look much like the booster station on Apache Drive in Meyers.

While residents initially could not understand why the station was being put in when it didn't affect their neighborhood directly, the district has explained the need to have better water flow when the next wildfire strikes the South Shore.

Elevation is one criterion for where it goes. Tying into certain service areas is another.

The staff report explains, "The project consists of the construction of a new booster pump station to improve the primary water service to approximately 3,000 existing homes in the Flagpole and Twin Peaks water zones. The project increases water reliability to the Flagpole and Twin Peaks water zones by providing a second source of water to the area currently served by only one pipeline from the Arrowhead water zone (located in Meyers)."

Thiel explained to the board the redundancy is needed in case the first booster station is taken out in a fire.

The board is expected to vote on the matter in May.

At the end of the hearing on Thursday, STPUD board President Dale Rise said, "We will try to get through this. We will satisfy the public, but the public as a whole – the 10,000 water customers. We will try to mitigate this and make you happy."

Click on information to read more about the project. Funding for the more than \$1 million project comes from matching funds for a Fire Protection Partnership Funding/USFS Forest Health Fund grant.