

Opinion: City Council throws road repairs under the bus

By Steve Kubby

What is the real budget for fixing our streets and how much will the South Lake Tahoe City Council be spending this year on badly needed road maintenance and pothole repairs?

Much has been written lately about the “new” City Council and its commitment to fixing our broken roads, which have gone virtually unfunded for 15 years. In fact, Nancy Kerry, the South Lake Tahoe public affairs and communications manager, recently responded to a column I wrote saying, “The City Council and city manager have for the past many months been stressing the importance of fixing the city’s streets. It is inaccurate to say otherwise. The City Council as a whole and each individually are on the record of stressing the importance of fixing the streets, advocating for the fixing of streets. The city has recently adopted a five-year financial plan where throughout, the importance of fixing the streets and improving the built environment are declared priorities.”



Really? That’s great to hear, but what does that actually translate to in budgeted dollars?

According to Jim Marino, engineer with the city, it will take \$5.2 million a year for 25 to 30 years – just to get the streets up to par. That was back in 2009 and since then the City Council has done nothing to address this rapidly escalating unfunded liability. What was once repairable, is rapidly becoming so damaged that it must now be replaced.

Every year we delay incurs even greater liabilities and destruction of our infrastructure.

So what percent of that figure will the City Council be spending this year? It's not easy to find the answer. Buried in the Capital Improvement budget is a budget for the "declared priority" of fixing our streets.

So, what is the real budget for fixing our streets? It turns out that the City Council has not even budgeted a tiny fraction of the \$5.2 million a year for 25 to 30 years just to get the streets up to par. No, this "declared priority" of fixing our streets will receive a total budget of \$100,000 or about 2 percent of what is needed. Furthermore, despite the "Five-Year Financial Plan," there is no actual budget for spending any more than 2 percent next year or the next five years.

Now, after 15 years of criminal neglect, the best the City Council can do for the "declared priority" of finally addressing this escalating unfunded liability, is to budget 2 percent of what is needed?

Our streets are not going to fix themselves. Every year we delay adds millions of dollars of debt to our community, our business and our homeowners. Either the citizens of this wonderful town demand a full budget to fix our streets or we can expect further economic decline for what was once a great destination resort. It is time to face the reality that you cannot have a world-class resort with Third World streets.

Frankly, if the City Council cannot even come up with an adequate budget to fix our crumbling roads, then it is worthless and should be dissolved.

Steve Kubby is a resident of South Lake Tahoe.