

Recreation measure language massaged to appeal to voters

By Kathryn Reed

R is for recreation. At least that's the thinking of the three-member panel that is moving closer to putting a measure on the November ballot that would redefine how Measure S money might be spent.

Measure S, approved in 2000, taxes property owners in El Dorado County who live in the Lake Tahoe Basin \$18 a year.

Two years ago people not satisfied with how far the money was going for ball fields failed in their attempt with Measure B.



No one talks about the sorry shape Tahoe Paradise Park is in -- and Measure S is supposed to help it. Photo/Kathryn Reed

What has people thinking voters will be more amenable to altering the measure now is that the cycling community is being considered. With Measure B, the money allocated for bike

trails would have been spent on ball fields.

Measure R, as the 2011 rewrite is being called, would allow bike trails installed pre-Measure S to be fixed with these funds that will continue to be collected until 2030.

The tax won't change; just how it can be spent will be.

It's at the June 30 meeting of South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority that the final vote is expected as to whether to definitively go forward. All the language for the ballot must be approved by July 29. Those wanting to write a rebuttal to be included in the Nov. 8 election material would have until Aug. 2 to do so.

The three-member JPA made up of El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago, South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Hal Cole and Tahoe Paradise Park board member Deborah Henderson met May 5 to talk about Measure R, which they dubbed it at the meeting.

They agreed to lose the Little League specific language and change it to youth baseball and softball fields. And instead of targeting improvements for the fields at Rufus Allen Boulevard and Lyons Avenue, money could go to fields within the boundaries of the special district.

Henderson relayed the message that her board would not support Measure R if there were any known opposition to it because of not seeing the money to do so as being a worthy expenditure.

It cost \$18,000 (money that is collected through Measure S) to bring Measure B to the ballot. It's not the people advocating for these changes that must incur the expense to do so, it's the taxpayers via Measure S. This in turn means less money going toward recreation. It could cost that much or double that amount to bring Measure R to voters in November. It's dependant on sharing the costs with other entities that have elections in November.

Santiago said the legalities of this are spelled out in the election code.

Gender equality

Part of the reason for making the language encompass girls and boys is Senate Bill 2404 enforces the civil rights of girls in community athletics as an institution in local jurisdictions and special districts.

The whole Title IX issue of equity in athletics at the K-12 level may play a roll as well as the lines of ownership of the fields becomes more convoluted, along with maintenance and accessibility.

Marilyn Breisacher voiced her concerns Thursday about the disparity among fields used for softball and baseball. The latter are in much better shape, including basics like covered dugouts.

To counter Little League coach Carl Buchholz's statement that every organization should be doing its part to keep fields playable, Breisacher said that would be easier if the softball teams didn't also have to pay to use the field at STHS.

Breisacher is also concerned girls will be losing a field in a proposal circulating amongst the city and Lake Tahoe Unified School District staff that would alter the use at South Tahoe High School. That whole issue – which would include a \$250,000 commitment from the city – is scheduled to be before the City Council May 17.

“Boys’ baseball teams currently have a decent field and concession building at South Tahoe Middle School. In order to bring about equity, LTUSD will construct a comparable concession building at the girls’ softball field, which will be available to ASA and other teams. Restrooms for their facility will be constructed as part of the new Joint Use Student Union Building. The city of South Lake Tahoe through

CACC (Community Athletic Coordinating Council) funds will improve the fields and assist in the material costs for the girls' dugout," LTUSD Superintendent Jim Tarwater wrote in an April 28 letter to the South Lake Tahoe City Council.

Another item in Title IX is that improvements to a playing area must be equal for the genders. While the football field at STHS gets lights this summer for its games to be played Friday nights, the theory is this opens the field up for girls soccer on weekends when normally football had access to the field.

Not everyone is in agreement that this meets the spirit of gender equality in K-12 sports because the improvements are in fact being made for football – a sport played by boys. The improvements to the STHS fields are the result of a lawsuit. Time will tell if the football field lights will prompt another Title IX lawsuit.

Some history

Originally Measure S was to pay for an ice rink (\$4.3 million facility opened in 2002), four ball fields (\$1.3 million spent near Lake Tahoe Community College on one field that opened in 2005), improve Tahoe Paradise Park (no evidence exists that has been done), and maintain 25 miles of new bike trails (about 10 miles have been built).

Most of the \$625,000 that is collected annually is spent on bond principal and debt – \$400,000. Tahoe Paradise Resort Improvement District receives \$50,000 a year, as does ball field maintenance. Bike maintenance is \$5,000 per new mile of new trail, with up to \$125,000 set aside/spent per year.

Another \$4,000 a year (or \$40/hour) goes to John Upton, the loan paid staff member. He was not at Thursday's meeting.