

South Tahoe on course to make capital improvements

By Kathryn Reed

A plan of action with clear priorities is being developed for South Lake Tahoe's infrastructure, facilities and equipment.

Jim Marino, who is in charge of the city's Capital Improvement Program, on Tuesday methodically laid out for the five council members the importance of creating a five-year plan, how getting money for projects today requires being shovel ready, and that each department in the city needs to have a master plan.

"The purpose of the CIP plan is to allow the City Council to accurately prioritize, fund, and implement projects that align with the strategic goals and objectives of the city, while effectively maintain and extend lifespan of existing assets," Marino wrote in the staff report.

1999 was the last time a five-year plan was developed. But for the most part, work done in the last decade was based on where grant dollars came from – and little or no other reasoning was used.



Pot holes are evidence of the lack of attention

South Tahoe
has shown for
capital
improvement in
the city.
Photo/LTN

Water quality projects always got the priority because of regulations from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board. Those two entities govern much of what the city and five counties in the Lake Tahoe Basin can do regardless of what local governments deem a priority. It's about lake clarity and reducing sediment – all other projects are secondary, according to these two regulatory bodies.

But to the city's discredit, until now it has not been proactive in devising plans that meld projects within the city or adjoining jurisdictions. Not having master plans for each department is part of the problem.

Items that would qualify as capital improvement projects in the three categories include:

Infrastructure:

- Highway 50 streetscape improvements
- Sierra Boulevard streetscape
- Harrison Avenue streetscape
- Tahoe Keys Boulevard right turn lane
- Linear Park bike trails

Facilities:

- Bijou Golf Course driving range

- Regan Beach restroom/concession facilities
- Reconstruct general aviation apron
- Recreation center fitness center reconstruction
- Replace roof at fire station No. 2

Equipment:

- Fleet replacement
- Replace SWAT rifles
- Video conferencing system
- GIS system
- Replace police department body armor.

Another point that was brought up May 3 is the city does not allocate money for regular fleet replacement or maintenance costs of projects.

Marino used the example of the three-year Highway 50 Trout Creek to Ski Run Boulevard project that starts this month. While Caltrans makes millions of dollars in improvements, it will be the city picking up the quarter of a million annual maintenance costs for landscaping, lighting and snow removal.

The council agreed maintenance and operation expenses need to be considered as projects come before them for approval. It's also an ongoing expense that must be budgeted.

It was stated that the Finance Department is going to have to figure out a different way of how it accounts for certain expenditures to make the budget work.

"Redistributing fees where they belong (is the first step)," Marino said. "Asset management software can collate costs over years. Excel spreadsheets can only go so far."

Another thing Marino and City Councilwoman Angela Swanson addressed is having true capital improvements part of this plan. Currently, items like guns for the police department and computer software are listed under CIP. This is not standard operating procedure for most cities or businesses.

Marino this week plans to start meeting with department heads to find out their list of priorities.

Health and safety concerns, along with regulatory compliance will be key reasons for a project to be at the top of the list. How to fund them will be another component.

Before the council is asked to put its blessing on priorities, the city's new Fiscal Sustainability Committee and the Planning Commission will review staff's list of priorities. Marino plans to have the list before the council this summer so priorities are in place as the 2011-12 budget is adopted.

In other action the council:

- Appointed the following people to the newly formed Fiscal Sustainability Committee – Jerry Bindel, Jill Stanton-Bricker, Dick Derby, Brenda Knox, Jon Kingsbury and Dan McHale.
- Without comment, approved the original \$10,000 fee for the consultant working on specs for a snowblower at Lake Tahoe Airport. Cost to the city is \$500. The rest is from an FAA grant. This is half the cost that was on the last council agenda.
- Approved wording on letters that will be sent to the Nevada Legislature supporting SB271 in the sense the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency needs to improve itself; and a letter to the board overseeing the League to Save Lake Tahoe. The final version of the latter is then intended to be sent to media outlets as an opinion piece.