

Opinion: City-TRPA rules hurt prosperity, art community

By Robert J. Schimmel

City policies and regulations are often beyond my logic. We need government, of course, especially the kind that enables quick decisions and the ability to take on unique and timely projects that embellish South Lake Tahoe's atmosphere. Common sense and productivity are wellsprings of a healthy economy and engendering new life to this endangered community.

And it is the arts that transcend seasons and economic levels, and attract people to Tahoe consistently year-round.

So why should it be seemingly impossible to simply paint and beautify an eyesore or create an atmosphere of excitement and innovation that attracts people? Current cases are the convention center fence-mural and Matthew Welter of Timeless Sculptures – chain saw and finished wood carver, mentor, full-time artist and promoter of Tahoe. I've been involved with both and don't understand why the city didn't resolve the fence painting and now can't find a way to help install Welter's performance art venue that will benefit South Lake Tahoe's artistic, arts-friendly image and, therefore, its economic base.

Mr. (Tony) O'Rourke appears to be a city manager who wants to pump life into South Lake Tahoe and must know that a real opportunity exists here for new excitement and noise that will energize others. The late Dennis Oliver demonstrated wisdom and determination when he pushed relentlessly on the TRPA and others to allow Welter's "Hand of Order" (30-foot-tall, abstract, cedar sculpture of Liberty) to reign over the meadow and precedent-setting sculpture garden at Ski Run Marina beginning last summer. That 4th of July celebration began the

“Liberty (R)evolution Convergence” event signaling a hopeful new direction this city needs to set itself apart, thereby attracting more people and an affluent clientele to our area.

Welter now seeks to carve a huge, futuristic Minuteman with old-fashioned musket at the intersection of Highway 50 and Ski Run Boulevard on city-owned property. The proposal has great support from surrounding businesses since the summer-long “performance” will attract people to it and the shops, restaurants and galleries in the area.

Currently, regulations that encumber many are grinding the approval process to a halt with a classification of “small scale manufacturing” for Welter due to his set-up request of longer than 14 days for his interactive, entertaining, and educational art form. Art production and display for the purposes set forth deserve their own classification or to be considered individually. No doubt there is valid reasoning for the 14-day limit (four times a year), but why not set up regulations that allow permission on a case-by-case basis, make them flexible, not limit the number of times per year, and allow the 14-day periods to be linked?

Yes, change takes time, but the will of the people can speak succinctly to our leaders. So any and all reading this who believe as I do, please call or email immediately your input to the city planning office at (530) 542.6020 or torourke@cityofslt.us. This is urgent regarding the project proposed by Welter that needs to be initiated by this July 4th Independence Day weekend.

Robert J. Schimmel is a professional artist, art teacher and consultant.