

Recreation advocates take sides on ballot measure

By Kathryn Reed

If an umpire had been in the room, several “players” would have been ejected.

And it was a good thing no children were there Thursday night, even though the subject matter was recreation. These grown men don’t all play nice together.

What brought them to the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Complex was to discuss Measure S and the possibility of changing it into Measure R. What got them riled up was if voters should be asked to change how the dollars are divvied up and how the dollars should be allocated.



John Upton and Norma Santiago get an earful at the June 16 meeting about rewriting Measure S.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

South Shore voters on the California side approved Measure S in 2000 to provide money to maintain future bike trails,

create ball fields, and build an ice rink – in that order. Instead, the order was reversed. The ice rink is done, one ball field is in, and little of the bike trail funds are spent because no asphalt is being laid.

The ball field proponents, led by John Cefalu and Measure S's lone paid staff member John Upton, tried in 2009 to get more money out of the measure for their preference and failed with Measure B. This time they brought the bike community to the table in hopes altering the measure's language to allow for old trails to be renovated would sweeten the pot.

"Little League is trying to get more money. I will very much be opposed. I think the funds should go to what was originally voted for," Jerome Evans, a former city recreation commissioner, said. (The only current rec commissioner at the June 16 meeting was Jonathan Moore.)

Evans and Cefalu traded verbal jabs. Evans was confrontational as he spoke. Cefalu and Upton were not always gentlemen-like, either. Cefalu eventually left the meeting when it came time for Evans to speak again.

Before he departed, Cefalu said based on the opinions of the dozen people in the room, he didn't see Measure R having the two-thirds votes needed to pass.

He suggested the bike people get their own measure on the ballot to raise funds for their cause.

The reality is what's left to be collected through 2030 from property owners at a rate of \$18/year for single family residences and what's in the bank from Measure S is not enough to take care of what voters thought they were paying for. Cyclists and baseball advocates agree on that much.

However, one person described it as everyone wanting a piece of the pie, with Measure R creating a smaller piece for bike trails. And it ultimately would no matter how people sugar

coat it.

Upton and Cefalu lobbied hard that doing nothing is sticking with the status quo. For them, and the ball field gang, it means not being able to make the improvements they want.

The status quo for cyclists means the only bike trails that would be improved are new ones when they need it.

It's the pot of money being set aside for those improvements that ball field advocates want to get their hands on.

Cyclists contend while the money for new trails is stagnant, one day the fiscal situation will change and those dollars voters approved for their maintenance will be needed.

The next step is the recreation joint powers authority will meet June 30. Because the meeting as been noticed to be at Lake Tahoe Airport at 9am, it will start there, and then be moved to the library on Rufus Allen Boulevard because of a conflict in scheduling. So attendees just need to be at the library about 9:15am.

The three members of the JPA (El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago, South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Hal Cole and Tahoe Paradise Park board member Deborah Henderson) will be asked to vote on a resolution to create Measure R and the November ballot language.

When asked Thursday by more than one attendee if any of this could be changed, Upton said an emphatic no. Santiago said the politically and legally correct answer of yes. A "no" would imply a decision had been made – which at a minimum violates the Brown Act. And it would be political suicide to admit to making a decision before a public hearing is conducted.

Santiago told *Lake Tahoe News* for the JPA board to consider amending the language of Measure R the verbiage would need to be presented in the necessary legalese at the June 30 meeting.

But the truth is the ballot language does not need to be finalized until July 29, so the JPA could schedule a special meeting to create some other iteration of Measure S if they so desired.

Santiago took issue with the allegation rewriting Measure S has not been transparent, citing the May 5 meeting that resulted in Measure R being tweaked.

But the truth is Kathay Lovell, as South Tahoe mayor last summer, approached the Bicycle Coalition, saying a compromise to amending Measure S needed to be found.

Talks between the Coalition's Ty Polastri, Upton and Cefalu started earlier this year. The first time the idea of altering S was brought to the public's awareness was at an April South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting.

By that time, the language for R was written. No public meetings were conducted before then to get input from anyone. It was all behind the scenes finagling by youth baseball leaders to get it to that point.

On a side note, the Cefalu family is involved in this in another way. Even though no money from Measure S goes to the ice rink operation, it was South Shore property owners who built it via the tax assessment. The city sought bids from people and entities wanting to run the rink, with Chris Cefalu – son of John Cefalu – being the frontrunner to get that bid in July when it comes to the City Council. The proposal was submitted by Tahoe Sports and Entertainment, owned by Van Oleson and Cefalu.

The is proposed Resolution and this is the proposed ballot measure.