

S. Tahoe council too tired to work; sign discussion delayed

By Kathryn Reed

It's 3:30 in the afternoon and the South Lake Tahoe City Council is too tired to finish what's on the agenda. It's the second meeting in a row the five have said they just don't have the stamina to keep going.

They've pulled the stamina card more than these two times. The five only meet twice a month – usually – to do the city's business the people have elected them to do, but they don't always work a full eight-hour day. They seldom take less than an hour for lunch.



This sign is out of compliance with South Lake Tahoe's ordinance.

Photo/LTN

In July, they only have one meeting scheduled.

Yes, they still had closed session to deal with Tuesday after canceling the workshop on signs. But the only item to be discussed was City Attorney Patrick Enright's review. This was the second meeting in a row for that topic. And earlier on

June 21 he got his 5 percent raise without any discussion. It was on the consent agenda – which is where non-controversial items tend to wind up because they don't need vetting.

Figuring out what to do about signs has been an issue most of the council members have wanted to tackle. But they keep deferring the issue.

Now the topic is slated for a special meeting on June 28 at 7pm at Lake Tahoe Airport. This means staff has to work late. Of course they already have been paid to sit through two meetings to not say a word about signs.

(The meeting will start at 6pm in closed session to discuss the complaint, which the city was served Tuesday afternoon, by the League to Save Lake Tahoe over the city's General Plan.)

The issue with signs is that most in the city limits don't comply with the ordinance. The previous council told the police department not to enforce the rules because it would mean another financial burden to businesses. Signs are not cheap.

Enforcement of temporary signs, like sandwich boards and banners, was never supposed to be lax.

Hilary Hodges, director of Development Services, is looking for direction from these five to see if as improvements are made to Highway 50 they want to enforce the sign ordinance.

As sidewalks and bike paths are put in at different places, it will mean some signs will have to be moved. The setback is supposed to be a minimum of 5 feet.

The questions are: Move the old sign out of the way? Or, put in a new sign out of the way that complies with the ordinance?

Next week's meeting will be a discussion, with no action taken.

Any business putting up a sign is supposed to have it go through a review process by the city's planning staff. The application fee for a sign permit is \$130.

When a damaged sign, like at Lily's Tires, is replaced with what was there – that's fine to do without a permit. (That particular sign is not in compliance, but is grandfathered in for the time being.) When a sign is replaced with something new, like what Barton did for its offices on Highway 50, they were supposed to have received a permit – and didn't, according to Hodges.

What are described as lollipop signs are non-conforming. The same goes for signs that list a ton of businesses like Kings Trading Post.

Group signs that follow the rules are at Ski Run Center and at the center anchored by Ross.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency in its Regional Plan also talks about signs. The city and five counties in the basin are allowed to have stricter regulations.