

Opinion: SB271 gives Nevada a greater say at Lake Tahoe

By Mike Young

As a longtime resident and Realtor who enjoys living in the Lake Tahoe area, I've spent nearly 25 years dealing with friends, clients and colleagues who are frequently frustrated by regulations and red tape imposed by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Thanks to a new law signed last month by Gov. Brian Sandoval, things are about to get better.



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Sandoval was wise to sign SB271, a bill passed in the waning moments of the Nevada Legislature that would enable Nevada to withdraw from the TRPA if the state's concerns with the agency are not addressed in the near future.

For years, California has dominated the bi-state regulatory board, imposing confusing and onerous regulations that have done more to detract from the economy and quality of life at Lake Tahoe than they have to protect its crystal clear waters and unique environment.

The TRPA's heavy-handed approach has made even the most routine development or home improvement project at Lake Tahoe a challenge.

To compound matters, the TRPA's Regional Plan was last approved in 1987 and expired in 2007.

Nevada state Sens. John Lee and James Settelmeyer, who were key sponsors of SB271, said one of its primary goals is to push for an updated Regional Plan guiding development decisions around the lake.

Other highlights of the Nevada law include:

- If the TRPA does not adopt an updated regional plan for the Lake Tahoe area, and if amendments supported by Nevada are not approved by Oct. 1, 2015, Nevada can withdraw from the compact on that date, unless its governor issues a proclamation extending the deadline for withdrawal to Oct. 1, 2017.
- This bill does not automatically call for Nevada's withdrawal from TRPA, nor does it change the current structure of the agency. The only thing that would change is the voting structure if California and Congress adopt Nevada's amendments to the compact. Nevada and California will continue to have the same number of seats on the Governing Board that they have now.
- SB271 eliminates the TRPA's super majority voting procedures that currently require four affirmative votes from Nevada and four affirmative votes from California. TRPA's Governing Board has 14 voting members and one nonvoting member. Each state appoints seven members, with a nonvoting member appointed by the president.
- Under an amendment proposed by Nevada Secretary of State Ross Miller, TRPA rules would now require at least four affirmative votes from the state in which a project is located and nine affirmative votes total.
- The new law does not change Lake Tahoe water quality standards. The Nevada Division of Environmental Protection and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Lahontan

Region, set the water quality standards at Lake Tahoe. This will not change.

Nevada can't act alone. If one state makes changes to the TRPA Compact, the other state's legislature has to adopt those changes. Once both states have adopted those changes, they have to be ratified by Congress. So, any change Nevada makes to the TRPA Compact must be approved by California and Congress.

Leaders on both sides of the lake still have a lot of work to do on this issue.

Sens. Lee and Settelmeyer deserve our thanks for having the courage, strength and conviction to bring forth this legislation. The discussion was necessary because for too long the frustrations of homeowners at Lake Tahoe were swept under the rug. SB271 brought those issues out in the open for all to consider.

Gov. Sandoval also deserves praise for his leadership on this issue. I personally know he was under tremendous pressure by those interested in the status quo to veto the bill. I know his love for the lake is strong, and like every Nevadan, that he does not want it harmed.

But at least this new law balances the scales and sends an important message to everyone – that Nevada's voice must be heard.

It tells our neighbors across the state line that we share their love of the lake and their deep desire to protect the environment.

This is about what is right for Lake Tahoe and the property owners like myself who love Lake Tahoe.

Mike Young, a longtime Realtor with Chase International in Incline Village, is the president of the Nevada Association of

Realtors, a professional trade association with nearly 15,000 members.