

Tahoans asked to help shape policy throughout basin

By Kathryn Reed

What policies would you change to make Lake Tahoe function better?

Define what local contribution means, promote stewardship, overhaul infrastructure, improve transit, who is responsible for operation and maintenance costs, encouraging public-private partnerships, mandatory mediation before litigation, alignment within and between organizations, and balance environmental and economic goals.

Those were some of the overriding themes at the South Shore meetings on Wednesday. While all are not policy statements per se, when they reach Sen. Dianne Feinstein's hands next week they will be written as such.



Renovating the old Mikasa building is an example of the private sector improving South Lake Tahoe.

Photo/LTN

Steve Teshara, with Sustainable Community Advocates, is tasked with culling together a manageable document to present to lawmakers.

Four workshops are being conducted in the basin at the request of Feinstein, D-Calif. Public sentiment, unlike years past, will be a central theme to this year's environment summit. Feinstein is hosting the public event at Homewood Mountain Resort on Aug. 16 from 9-11:30am.

Two public vetting sessions were Aug. 3 in South Lake Tahoe, with two more today. The first is from 10am-noon at Granlibakken Resort in Tahoe City and then from 3-5pm at the North Tahoe Events Center in Kings Beach.

Five suggested topics were presented to the approximately 30 people (combined for the South Shore meetings), which included:

- Water clarity
- Infrastructure turnover
- Complete streets and transit
- Sustainable prosperity and stewardship
- Opportunities to expand regional match investment for the environmental improvement program.

Forest fuels was not broached until the Wednesday evening session when *Lake Tahoe News* brought up the issue. An unfunded mandate, like Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board's total maximum daily load, was another issue *LTN* triggered discussion about.

While Doug Smith with Lahontan tried to convince the room the TMDL is not an unfunded mandate, it fell on deaf ears. Same with his contention the regional board does not answer to the state water board.

Consensus was met on the need for greater public-private partnerships as well as looking at the region as a whole and not just project-by-project. Some of the thinking is to better leverage dollars and resources, as well as to possibly have combined projects meet TRPA thresholds.

Several people brought up how agencies don't have the same philosophy throughout the organization. While this is not something the politicians can change, it is something they can advocate for. After all, 85 percent of the land in the Lake Tahoe Basin is owned by public agencies.

It's getting the left hand to know what the right hand is doing.

The same goes for having each agency be on the same page.

"We need consistency," El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago said.

With the basin being such a litigious environment, it was suggested mediation be required before a lawsuit could be filed. While some suggested the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency rewrite the Compact to make that happen, it was noted resolutions are on the books that could bring some changes without the need for an act of Congress.

Ty Polastri with the Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition said money is out there, but people are hesitant in the current "I'll sue you if you do that" atmosphere to write a check.

All heads appeared to nod in agreement.

Gary Midkiff, who once worked for TRPA and now has a private consulting firm, said it costs too much money and takes too long to bring a project forward in Lake Tahoe.

While the public has been asked before to weigh-in on such matters with no obvious outcome, this is new to have a U.S. senator go to the residents of Lake Tahoe.

Teshara said he believes Tahoe is at a tipping point – on the edge to right the ship that has been listing for so long.

Anyone wanting to submit policy suggestions may do so until Aug. 8 by emailing them to steveteshara@gmail.com.