

A vision for South Shore's future begins to unfold

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Vision – that is what has been missing from the South Shore.

“If we are going to be a world-class outdoor destination, we need the commercial areas to complement the scenery,” Mike Bradford told Douglas County commissioners Thursday.



Design
Workshop's
vision for the
South Shore
near the state
line.

The county in its quest to bring economic vitality to the lake and valley created 12 project areas to focus on, with the casino corridor at Stateline being one of them. Bradford, who is part owner and runs Lakeside Inn and Casino, is the leader of that project.

As he brought others into the scoping process it became evident work needed to start at the state line and spread from there – which meant going into South Lake Tahoe.

While in the past the line separating California and Nevada

has been a point of demarcation for those in charge, tourists never saw a line – except for where it was legal to gamble.

Ironically, it's gaming that has erased the line for local officials and what is bringing them to the same table. Indian casinos in California have put the kibosh on gaming being king of the South Shore. While people move to Lake Tahoe for the outdoors and tourists have been drawn to the area for the same reason, it took the casino industry to be in decline for a decade for those who control the marketing dollars to realize a new business model is needed.

Lake Tahoe News first reported in July that the South Shore Vision Plan was in the works. Aspects of it were outlined for Douglas County commissioners at their Oct. 20 meeting in Stateline. A formal presentation will be made to that board when it has a joint meeting with the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Nov. 4 at noon at Edgewood Tahoe. It is a public meeting.

What the commissioners agreed to Thursday was to put up \$10,000 of the \$35,000 needed to fund the economic analysis of the plan. Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority and South Lake Tahoe are each being asked to put up \$10,000, while the South Tahoe Alliance of Resorts is giving \$5,000. The latter paid the \$50,000 to Design Workshop to create the plan.

Dealing with TRPA

"We are giving the reins to the governments to move forward and get it into the (TRPA) Regional Plan," Bradford said.

One issue to overcome in order to get this plan on the ground is to allow the five counties and one city in the Lake Tahoe Basin to have greater control of their destiny instead of being told what to do by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Harmon Zuckerman, who until last month when his contract was not renewed was spearheading the much overdue Regional Plan

update, supported a more liberal approach to planning than had occurred in the past. Sources have told *Lake Tahoe News* that Arlo Stockham is pulling back on transect planning that integrates mixed uses. However, TRPA says just the opposite is true. In fact, the plan is to give greater authority to local jurisdictions.

With the TRPA being Big Brother in the basin, for the last 40 years local jurisdictions have been under the bi-state regulatory agency's thumb. While local politicians have not orchestrated an Occupy Lake Tahoe movement, they are talking and do want more control of what happens in their borders.

When the TRPA Governing Board meets Oct. 26 at 9:30am in Kings Beach it will hear a presentation from staff about the approach.

In some ways, South Lake Tahoe may have the most power because its boundaries are entirely within the basin. This compares to the five counties whose seat of governance is outside the basin.

"This plan should serve as a foundation, a catalyst for what can and should happen for the South Shore and Douglas County," Douglas County Manager Steve Mokrohisky told *Lake Tahoe News* before the meeting. "I think everyone recognizes the current model does not allow for pedestrian friendly development, access to the lake, and has challenges regarding the environment."

The plan

Richard Shaw with the Aspen office of Design Workshop will be at the November meeting to go over the 32-page South Shore Vision Plan. (He was not available to comment for this story.) The plan will be available to the public at that time.

What is presented in the document is not completely new. The loop road directing traffic off Highway 50 and around the

casinos is still the major focal point. Overall, the plan goes from Ski Run Boulevard to Kahle Drive.



Stateline Avenue is being proposed as a gateway to lake recreation. Renderings/Design Workshop

“The cost of Loop Road is something in the \$70 million range. That is a tough nut to crack,” Mokrohisky said.

Both state transportation departments are likely to be asked to fund the bulk of the work, with the possibility of tapping into the federal jobs bill if that were to pass.

Mokrohisky said the county is talking to NDOT and that it will be up to city officials to get Caltrans on board.

While the plan put forth by Design Workshop is just that – a plan – it is something the government bodies on the South Shore need to vote on to proceed with. That could happen at the joint November meeting in two weeks.

The plan calls for a minimum sidewalk zone of 20-feet from Park Avenue to the Horizon. The speed limit would be 25mph, with multiple crossings for pedestrians.

The idea is it would make the state line area a more walkable, downtown destination, with the bulk of the traffic diverted behind the casinos.

While this idea has literally been talked about for decades, the powers that be believe now is the time to carry the idea forward.

“The principal focus at this point is from Stateline to the end of Loop Road. If we can get that fixed, the rest will be easy,” Tony O’Rourke, South Lake Tahoe city manager, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He is one of the nearly 50 people who has been involved in the process to work with Design Workshop to build the vision.

“This is a bold, progressive plan. I like the whole thing,” O’Rourke said. “Clearly it’s an attempt to redefine that corridor. It’s dated and old and won’t meet the needs of destination guests.”

Part of the vision put forth by the Design Workshop says, “Retail activities will frame places for pedestrians; the centers of activity will be engaging places, providing for event programming and strong design appeal; the streets will be developed with outside dining, landscaped edges and ‘complete street design character’; local community orientation and service can be incorporated creating a rich mix of retail opportunities.”

Giving the casinos a makeover is proposed – especially at the ground level to have them be something other than spacious, vacant gaming venues.

Access to the lake has long been talked about. This, too, is a bit of an irony considering all the marketing-tourism gurus say people come to Lake Tahoe for the lake. One would think if this were the main reason, people wouldn’t be having such a hard time finding it if that were their goal.

Now the gurus say no one can find the lake and it needs to be more of a focal point.

“We need to deliver the lake to residents and visitors,” Mokrohisky said. “I have known people who came to Lake Tahoe and they are here several days before they see the lake or get access or know how to get there. This plan lays out the fundamental principals of what we need to do to provide access.”

The plan says, “A new public recreation beach will expand to the north side of Stateline Ave. to fulfill needed water based recreation. Scenic views will result from the recreational acquisitions.”

Maybe someone should ask the visitors and locals why they are here. Maybe it's the mountains and not the lake.

What's next?

After the elected officials on the South Shore review the plan in two weeks they will be tasked with deciding how to go forward. Douglas County without even seeing the full presentation is on board to study if the plan is economically feasible. Presuming that study is funded and comes to fruition (LTVA will oversee the bid process), and then environmental analyses will be conducted.

Bradford said the economic component would likely look at what happens if nothing were done, and then forecast for five, 10 and 20 years out.

Everyone agrees public buy-in is crucial. Also agreed to is to make any plan a reality it will take public-private partnerships.

Jobs and tax revenue – those will be the economic indicators that will push the plan forward.

If the numbers work, then the environmental concerns will be

looked at. Lake clarity, total maximum daily loads, coverage, height issues, transportation, density – all of that would be addressed. That is why if TRPA doesn't get its Regional Plan done by the latest deadline of December 2012 (originally it was due in 2007), nothing will happen.

The other buy-in needed is from private property owners who have not been at the table but whose property the planners have other ideas for.

The right players, the right time – the stars being aligned – that is what makes this vision different, according to officials.

“The vision plan creates a path we can head down together,”
Mokrohisky.