

Homewood to enter 21st century with mega-upgrades

By Kathryn Reed

TAHOE CITY – What's another 10 hours when five years had already been spent on the revitalization plan of Homewood Mountain Resort? For Art Chapman, sitting in a room all day Wednesday listening to people praise and rip apart his plan was worth it.

Chapman is president of JMA Ventures, the San Francisco-based development company that bought Homewood in summer 2006.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board on Dec. 14 did not cast a dissenting vote on the multiple motions needed to adopt the final environmental impact statement, Regional Plan amendments and phase 1 of the Homewood Mountain Ski Area Master Plan.



Homewood will be getting a mid-mountain lodge with a public swimming pool.

Despite the approval after the marathon meeting at Granlibakken resort, a lawsuit was filed Dec. 8 to stop the project based on California Environmental Quality Act

violations. The California Clean Energy Committee filed the suit against Placer County and JMA.

“The committee’s supporters on the West Shore will be directly and adversely impacted by the implementation of the project and by the failure of the Homewood Mountain Resort Ski Area Master Plan EIR/EIS to adequately evaluate the impacts of the project and to propose mitigation as required pursuant to CEQA,” according to the Homewood CEQA writ.

People who would be on the defendants’ side at the meeting told *Lake Tahoe News* they believe the final EIS addresses the concerns brought forward in the lawsuit and are not concerned.

Chapman after the meeting spoke one-on-one with *Lake Tahoe News*.

“If this thing were to work, it had to be embraced by the locals. And that’s why we will be successful when we build it,” Chapman said of the Homewood project.

Of the 22 people who spoke against it, most were in favor of doing something, but on a much-reduced scale.

Fifty people spoke for the project, while two others fell in the neutral category.

Of the people who spoke, more full-time residents want the project, while part-time/second homeowners don’t want things to change. It was obvious the economic situation in the Lake Tahoe Basin – loss of jobs, little or no public-private investment, and declining school enrollment – has taken its toll on locals. They are the ones welcoming JMA – its money, jobs and goal of revitalizing the West Shore.

Much was said of how this project will be good for the economy and good for the environment. It will create 500 construction jobs and 180 year-round positions.

Chapman expects to add nearly \$7 million to the tax rolls, and

between \$16 million and \$20 million to the West and North shore economies on an annual basis.

“I hope it rejuvenates the local economy,” Chapman said.

He and his wife have lived in Placer County for the last eight years. When the residences are built at Homewood he intends to move there.

As a skier, Chapman told *Lake Tahoe News* one day he hopes to be able to ski between Homewood, Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley. As it is, with JMA entering a partnership with KSL Capital Partners to create Squaw Valley Holdings so the two entities jointly operate Alpine and Squaw, putting Homewood into the mix could be easy.

“It’s not that far from the top of Homewood to the backside of Alpine,” Chapman said. He likes the idea of making Tahoe be like European ski resorts with linking terrain.

The environment

Environmental gains beyond what is required are part of the plan. At the meeting Chapman agreed to monitor for 10 years how well the impervious materials are working.

By the time it’s built Chapman expects to have secured an LEED gold certificate for construction.

Improvements have begun, with 88,000 fewer pounds of sediment reaching the lake. By build out that number will rise to 154,000 pounds a year.

TRPA standards are that filtration systems must sustain a 20-year event, or 1 inch of rain in an hour.

Homewood’s plans call for twice that standard.

Generators will be able to be used on the snowmaking equipment if there were ever a wildfire, so firefighters have an added

mechanism to put out the flames.

Coverage – a concept unique to the basin that stipulates how much land can literally be covered – will be reduced by 235,000 square feet. The TRPA regulation has to do with erosion.

Project concerns

Issues brought up at the TRPA meeting included how much traffic the development will create. The lawsuit also takes issue with the numbers Placer County approved which are the numbers JMA cites.

JMA says winter vehicle miles traveled will decrease based on providing free dial-a-ride service to local residents and the idea guests will be staying longer than a weekend visit. The bus will run from the Y in Tahoe City to Emerald Bay. Ten will run in the winter, three in summer. Beaver Creek is the model being used.

“Upon completion, traffic will be less than five years ago,” Chapman told the board. He also said state statistics show traffic along that stretch of Highway 89 has decreased by 30 percent in the last 10 years.

Board member Mara Bresnick liked the League to Save Lake Tahoe’s idea to have rigorous monitoring of traffic. That was agreed to. The number of vehicles coming to Homewood will be tracked. Tracking use alternative transportation and surveys of guests about how they got to the resort are also part of the conditions.

Concerns are traffic on busy weekends will be even worse going through Tahoe City at the Y. While plans are in the works to reroute Highway 89 so it no longer goes over Fanny Bridge, construction of a bypass is years away and at this rate is likely to occur after Homewood breaks ground. (The TRPA Advisory Planning Commission is scheduled to discuss Fanny

Bridge on Jan. 11, 9:30am at the Stateline office. JMA is required to pay for part of the bridge bypass.)

Added on Wednesday was the agreement to monitor traffic for 20 years.

Board members Clem Shute and Bresnick insisted if vehicle numbers are higher than what's expected, there must be some sort of mitigation requirements and that phase 2 doesn't get approved without addressing vehicle issues.

Everyone agrees summer vehicle trips will increase because the resort as it is today is used for one season.

A water taxi will be operated by Homewood in summer. Free bikes will be available. Completion of the West Shore bike trail is being paid for by JMA. Access to hiking will be allowed – whereas now people would be trespassing. The pool at mid-mountain will be open to the public. And the mid-mountain lodge will be open year-round.

The goal is Homewood will be a year-round destination.

But not everyone is thrilled with that. One of the 74 speakers talked about how it's ridiculous to build a five-star resort at a three-star mountain.

Chapman, on Wednesday and at the multitude of meetings he's spoken at, said if the project he wants to develop wasn't approved, he would have to shutdown the ski resort which will be 50 years old in 2012.

The tiny West Shore town with its population of 744 residents could grow if and when the project is developed. A late revise by JMA was to eliminate the fractional ownership units and make them whole ownership.

The development

Chapman expects to break ground on the \$500 million project in

summer 2014. Final designs and permits need to be secured between now and then.

The plan calls for 56 residential condominiums, 47 multi-family condominiums, 48 ski-in/ski-out chalets, 13 workforce-housing apartments and a 75-room hotel.

Chapman made no bones about the real estate portion being the financial driver for everything else. He said with Homewood having about 100,000 skier visits a year, the average skier spending \$6.48 on food and beverage, and no profit in ski school, it will take the real estate to drive on-mountain improvements. Even with an estimated increase of 18,400 skiers a year upon build out, Chapman said it wouldn't substantially move the bottom line.

"Before we can borrow money for real estate, we need to prove the ski area is viable. This little ski operation can't afford to spend \$12 million on lifts or \$10 million on a mid-mountain lodge or \$13 million on (a base) lodge," Chapman said. "Real estate is the golden goose."

The EIS/EIR and amendments that were voted on can be found on the TRPA's website.