

Opinion: Suggestions for how to fix South Lake Tahoe

By Steve Kubby

South Lake Tahoe should be one of the greatest destinations in the world. Aside from the stunning beauty of the lake, we are blessed with amazing writers, athletes and artists in this community. Meanwhile, Heavenly Mountain Resort is quickly becoming one of the best ski resorts in the world and their claim to the best tree skiing on planet Earth is no exaggeration.

Unfortunately, our fair city looks less like a world class destination and more like a ghost town these days. Even the bank can't afford decent landscaping. Hard times have hit South Lake Tahoe and much of it, like the huge 12-acre crater near Stateline, can be traced to the sins of local government and redevelopment.



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The city of South Lake Tahoe was incorporated in 1965 by combining the previously unincorporated communities of Al Tahoe, Bijou, Bijou Park, Stateline, Tahoe Valley, and Tallac Village. The stated purpose for creating the city was to provide its own snow removal, road repairs and policing, since it was felt that El Dorado County was not providing adequate services. Within a year, the city council had already abandoned their original mission and granted \$40,000 to their

supporters on the local tourist bureau.

Since then, the city council has all but abandoned the roads and focused the bulk of its time and money on redevelopment schemes that assume the need for a centrally planned economy and a regulatory environment that is one of the worst in the country. Just this year, the city council will spend \$1.8 million on redevelopment, while spending a pathetic \$100,000 on road repair. Since beginning redevelopment 15 years ago, the city has stopped nearly all funding for road repairs, accumulating over \$100 million in damage to the existing city roadways, according to its own estimates.

Fixing South Lake Tahoe isn't that complicate, if we can just go back to those original three priorities of snow removal, road repairs and policing.

But first, the voters need to make some decisions:

- Do you really want to live in a city where traffic and parking enforcement has been stepped up in order to pay the salaries of the enforcers?
- Do you want snow removal done by outsiders who have submitted the lowest bids and will replace our local dedicated and experienced crews?
- Is it fair that everyone who rents has to pay the TOT and \$200 million in bonded debt, money that was used to benefit Marriott and Vail?
- Do you want a city council that believes in police powers to seize property and incur massive debts without a general vote?

If your answer to these questions is no, then here is what we must do to end this failure in local government:

- Forget about redevelopment and focus on basic services.
- Hire an outside accounting firm to perform a forensic audit

of the city's finances.

- Stop aggravating tourist with aggressive enforcement of traffic and parking ordinances.
- Stop squandering money on studies, consultants and tourist promotions.
- Stop retiring city officials at 100 percent of their salary.
- Stop hiring new city officials with astronomically high salaries and benefits.
- Stop electing city council members who don't believe in free markets, personal freedom or private property.

Of course, there are those who will tell you that everything is under control and not to listen to those who have sounded the alarm. They will tell you to ignore the findings of the El Dorado Grand Jury of wrongdoing and malfeasance by the city council. Instead, they will steadfastly claim that redevelopment has been a great success and that the free market can't be trusted to provide affordable housing and controlled growth. However, why is it that no other city in the Basin has undertaken redevelopment?

Certainly, the North Shore looks a whole lot better than the South Shore, so those who advocate for redevelopment have a lot of explaining to do.

In the meantime, an honest appraisal of the financial crisis facing the city has yet to be made by city officials. Until that happens and the city admits it is broke, nothing is going to get fixed. Like an alcoholic who is in denial, the city council needs to admit to past failures, its current debt and the enormous unfunded liabilities it has incurred. Only when we have faced the true magnitude of the unfunded road and retirement liabilities, will we be ready to slash all the fat and get back to basic services.

Steve Kubby is a resident of South Lake Tahoe.