

Artist wins round 1 against S. Tahoe for taking his possessions

By Kathryn Reed

If a picture is worth a thousand words, what are an artist's tools worth?

South Lake Tahoe officials may soon have to answer that question.

Artist Peter Darvas won his appeal before the South Lake Tahoe City Council this week – meaning he won't have to pay the \$3,437.50 abatement fine. But now he wants the city to pay for the items officers took from his backyard and subsequently destroyed without his knowing this was going to happen.



Peter Darvas

After the Jan. 17 meeting, Darvas told *Lake Tahoe News* he never saw a list from the city of the items it wanted cleaned up. And he did not receive a certified letter until the abatement was over.

“They looted the entire place,” Darvas said.

Darvas contends the 6-foot cedar fence surrounding his property in the 3100 block of Pioneer Trail is not visible from the street. The city says otherwise.

Because of a complaint, which has not been made public, and the problem originating in 2009, the city decided it was time to take action.

Community Service Officer Bob Albertazzi told the council he sent registered letters and posted a letter at Darvas' residence to no avail. City code allowed him to hire a contractor to remove the materials from Darvas' property even though they were behind a fence. Albertazzi told the council some of what was hauled off was up to his discretion. For instance, a cabinet was left, but the materials spilling out were removed.

Darvas contends much of the mess in the yard was for his artwork as well as for the shows he puts on in the South Shore – things like cement for sculpting and canopies for festivals.

He admits things were a mess and some of the items needed to be hauled off. He told *Lake Tahoe News* the appliances the city disposed of were on a trailer ready for the dump.

The council in its 3-1 vote siding with Darvas on Tuesday had concerns that he never received any of the notifications about the abatement proceedings as well as the paperwork was for one parcel number when he owns two adjoining lots. The second lot is where the items were located. Mayor Claire Fortier was the dissenting vote and Councilman Hal Cole recused himself because he lives within 300 feet of Darvas' property.

Darvas has hired an attorney and told *Lake Tahoe News* he intends to pursue a civil complaint against the city for compensation for the goods that were confiscated. He would not put an exact dollar amount on what was taken, but said it is well into six figures.

In situations like this the city cleans up a lot and destroys all goods taken so it's not a matter of being able to give anything back to Darvas.

