

Seniors, mental health clients to share building in S. Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Seniors and some mental health patients are likely going to share the same building this spring in South Lake Tahoe. This co-mingling of usually different populations has some people concerned.

Erik Olsen, one of the seniors who spoke against the proposal on Thursday, told *Lake Tahoe News* seniors should have their own place to socialize and that's it is not up to him to find a solution, it's government's problem.



Community
Development
Director Stan
Sherer
explains to
seniors Jan. 5
how the city
and county
need to save
money,
pointing to
how a year ago
the city's rec

staff had
seven
employees and
now it has
one.

Photo/Kathryn
Reed

The problem governments have – specifically the city of South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County – is the lack of money to keep operating as they have been. That is why they are consolidating resources. In this case the main resource is a building.

The county owns the senior center building, while the city runs the programs for the seniors. With the county no longer able to pay to lease some of the buildings it has been within the city limits that it uses to serve Lake Tahoe Basin residents, it is moving some operations to the county-owned senior building to lessen its financial burden.

Closing the county office at 1900 Lake Tahoe Blvd. and other changes is a savings of about \$190,000 a year for the county.

The county operating out of the senior center means the city has help with utility and maintenance costs. It also will allow an “official” to be on site at all hours when the building is open.

The Board of Supervisors is scheduled to discuss and vote on the changes at the Jan. 24 meeting. The City Council is likely to take up the issue Feb. 7.

Olsen, who is a former national president of AARP, questions how the center can change what it is used for when some of the funding to upgrade the facility was from the Older Americans Act and other grants.

George Regan thinks mental health should look at using the

library's reading room.

City and county officials have been meeting with seniors for months. The latest gathering was Jan. 5 with Community Development Director Stan Sherer explaining the city's point-of-view and answering questions. The week before it was Supervisor Norma Santiago addressing the lunch crowd.

"This is purely a fiscal crisis we are trying to address in our community," Sherer said Thursday. "Change is difficult. We didn't do this on a whim."

The main change is the county will take over the room being used for senior exercise classes for one-on-one sessions with mental health clients. The room has a separate entrance so the newcomers don't have to access the main senior center.

Sherer reiterated services for seniors are not being cut. Figuring out a solution to keep the exercise classes going is still being worked out.

The proposal is mental health workers will be in that room Monday-Thursday, 1-4pm.

Ann Snyder, a senior, has been acting as a liaison to get information to seniors. She addressed her peers first.

"The clientele is characterized as functional," Snyder said of the mental health patients who will have sessions at the senior center. "The clients will mostly be bused to the center so it will not impact parking."

Sherer also said employees will be parking at the recreation center and more disabled parking will be marked at the senior center to help with congestion.

Also sharing the site will be the county Veterans Administration. These people will use the Annex Meeting Room, which is to the left of the dining area. This should mean expanded services for veterans on the South Shore.

Changes could happen in February, but March is a more likely scenario.