

Douglas County officials tout goals to reinvigorate economy

By Anne Knowles

MINDEN – Douglas County’s multifaceted strategy to boost its economy is working, according to proponents who presented an update on the economic vitality plan to the county’s Board of Commissioners.

“It’s a feel-good meeting I am happy to report,” said Mike Bradford, CEO of the Lakeside Inn and Casino in Stateline, who led the meeting at the Carson Valley Inn here and leads the Tahoe Revitalization team for the county.

Tahoe Revitalization is one of a dozen components of the roadmap adopted 17 months ago by the county. Each piece is overseen by a team of local businesspeople, and county and city government representatives who are responsible for turning talk into action and delivering measureable results.



Construction of a bike path connecting Round Hill Pines Beach to Stateline is part of Douglas County's

economic
revitalization
plans.
Photo/LTN file

“The goal is to transform the South Shore into a true mountain recreation spot,” Mitchell Mize, director of real estate for Edgewood Companies and a member of the Tahoe Revitalization team, said at the Feb. 10 meeting.

“We need to resurrect the entertainment that used to be there,” he said. “And we need to influence the TRPA’s (Tahoe Regional Planning Agency) Regional Plan update to allow the kind development we need there.”

Rize said the “grand plan” – the South Shore Vision Plan – is complete. That plan, developed with \$50,000 supplied by the South Tahoe Alliance of Resorts, will complement the combined \$25 million Embassy Suites and MontBleu resorts on the South Shore have invested in hotel renovations. Another \$35,000 to conduct an economic impact study was provided by STAR, the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, Douglas County and South Lake Tahoe. And \$2.5 million from the Federal Highway Administration is funding the South Shore bikeway demonstration project featuring 3.2 miles of bike paths connecting Stateline to Round Hill Pines, which will break ground this summer.

Next up, said Rize, is completion by year-end of an environmental impact statement for the Highway 50 revitalization plan, which would turn the highway into a three-lane local roadway in through the Stateline casino corridor while realigning the highway through a neighborhood to the east, as well as securing funding from both private and government sources for construction of the project.

Rize said, in the end, the success of the teams’ efforts will be measured in room nights, transient occupancy tax collected,

commercial vacancy rates, gaming revenues and investment in commercial property.

“We’re looking to compete with Vail and Aspen,” concluded Rize.

Melissa Shaw Granat, team leader for the Tremendous Trails element of the plan, said 16 miles of trails above Genoa with connections to the Tahoe Rim Trail would open this spring. The 100-mile loop of trails planned for the county was recently christened the Carson Valley Discovery Trail after an August survey and workshop helped pick the name and the Flagship Trail map is almost complete, which should help draw visitors to the area. Also to help promote tourism, the team is working with the California Tahoe Conservancy on a smart phone application that would map area trails and on creating signage for the paths.

Granat said they are working with area visitors’ authorities to find ways to measure the economic impact of trails.

Gardnerville and Genoa, the focus of two of the plan’s components, have already been able to gauge progress in terms of new businesses. Genoa, which is trying to capitalize on its historic downtown, has recently added seven businesses, including three restaurants, a consignment shop and a clothing boutique, said Dan Aynesworth, team leader for Genoa Destination. That’s a 46 percent jump in new businesses when the target was 10 percent, said Aynesworth. Room nights have increased 6 percent, he said, with a goal of 7 percent.

Redesign plans for Genoa’s downtown are half completed, said Aynesworth. The Genoa Trail, funded with \$100,000 from The Nature Conservancy, is 60 percent designed and construction should begin in June, with completion planned by the Candy Dance in September. A covered wagon that will be turned into a road sign for the town located on Highway 395 East has been acquired with \$6,800 from the town. Casino owner and local

rancher John Ascuaga has donated \$1,500 for the cemetery beautification project.

Gardnerville added 16 businesses last year, a 9.5 percent increase, said Paula Lochridge, leader of the Main Street Gardnerville team. She said they have a 10-year goal of getting the commercial vacancy rate down to 5 percent, recruiting 10 new businesses and creating 50 new jobs.

Other presentations were made on Ascent Douglas, the work to attract sporting goods manufacturers to the county; Sports Aviation Foundation, work to bring more aviation, including gliding, tourism to the area; the county's K-12 education and transportation needs; and the long-awaited Carson Valley Community and Senior Center, which is scheduled to open in 2014.

Three components of the plan – Maximize WNC Facility, Minden Momentum and Energy Science Park – have teams but have yet to find a so-called champion, or leader to move them forward, said Lisa Granahan, economic vitality manager for the county.