

S. Tahoe tries to make special events less of a problem

By Kathryn Reed

An angry citizenry prompted South Lake Tahoe officials to look closely at how it handles special events.

Guidelines were thoroughly discussed April 3 during a City Council workshop at which six members of the public gave their input, plus one letter was read into the record.

New Year's Eve weekend's SnowGlobe music festival, which definitely helped the economy, rattled so many houses that some nerves are still frayed more than three months later.



December's
SnowGlobe
music fest
forced South
Tahoe's hand
to formalize
special event
guidelines.
Photo/LTN file

The council at the April 17 meeting is expected to adopt guidelines for special events.

The problem with SnowGlobe was the sound – not of music per se – but the excessive bass associated with the type of music that spilled from the community ball fields at Lake Tahoe Community College.

To prevent a repeat of those problems, the city is considering imposing rules that call for special events to be between 10am and 10pm, with decibel levels of no more than 95.

“Ninety-five dbA is restrictive. Most cities are generic,” City Manager Tony O’Rourke said. But he also said it’s easier to relax rules than to implement them after the fact – thus the reason he supports the 95dbA.

He pointed out how the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency’s noise rules call for sound not to exceed a certain limit over a sustained 24-hour period. Based on that criterion, the booming sound from SnowGlobe did not violate TRPA rules.

In doing research, South Tahoe officials found two cities with decibel limits higher than what is being proposed locally. Aspen and West Palm Beach have limits of 100dbA.

With these being guidelines and not an ordinance, it means staff has more flexibility. For instance, it’s likely another New Year’s Eve event could have an end time of 12:30am so revelers could celebrate the new year. But to avoid another SnowGlobe incident, either speakers will be positioned differently, or acts will be scheduled so the less deafening ones come on last.

Having a say in the schedule is part of the guidelines.

Some discussion Tuesday centered on whether the city should charge a permit fee.

It was pointed out by staff as well as B Gorman, CEO of the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, that it takes most events a handful of years before they turn a profit.

"People have no idea how expensive events are," Gorman said, relaying how people after year two of Sample the Sierra asked where the proceeds are going. The \$30,000-plus spent on tents and other materials for the event are still being paid off.

Money for the city comes via hotel and sales taxes.

Gorman suggested in addition to city staff, that someone like Carol Chaplin, head of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, be on the events committee.

While Councilmembers Claire Fortier and Tom Davis liked that idea, Councilwoman Angela Swanson said someone less entrenched in the business, like a member of the city's recreation commission, should be involved.

That issue was not resolved at the meeting.

Where events can be conducted was another issue brought up at the meeting.

"Venues are our biggest obstacle," Stan Sherer, community services director, said.

The South Shore is an obvious draw because of its natural beauty, easy drive from the Bay Area and Central Valley, and proximity to Reno-Tahoe International Airport. But locations for events are lacking.

A baseball tournament coming to the area in the summer is using fields throughout the basin and in Gardnerville.

Cody Bass wants to bring a festival on the scale of Outside Lands that is staged in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. He envisions the way to do that is to convert Bijou Community Golf Course into a music venue. He'd like that to happen Labor Day weekend.

JoAnn Conner, president of South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce, would like the city to look at the number of similar events it

allows at a given site – for example how many crafts fairs are at South Tahoe Middle School.

Councilman Hal Cole, remembering the contentious nature of meetings regarding arts events, said he is not ready to revisit that issue.

Another aspect of future events is a waste management plan will be required, with the goal of being zero waste.