

TRPA Regional Plan update documents prompt questions

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – As the public starts to sift through the thousands of pages of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Regional Plan update and the accompanying environmental documents, common questions are being asked.

Wednesday was the third of four sessions this week for people to give comments and ask questions. The open houses on Monday and Tuesday – one on the North Shore and one on the South Shore – combined had more than 75 people asking questions and going to various information stations.



TRPA board members on May 23 discuss the Regional Plan.
Photo/LTN

At the May 23 Governing Board meeting in Kings Beach 12 people gave comments during the public hearing about the Regional Plan, while a handful were allowed to speak at the beginning of the meeting instead of waiting for the board to get to the agenda item.

Alex Leff, conservation director for Friends of the West Shore, is concerned about what he called the countless land use planning exemptions.

"The sheer amount of exemptions is poor planning," Leff told the board.

Developing land designated for recreation has people concerned. Several believe this will create an urban feel in areas.

An example staff used where this would be allowed is putting condos or a hotel on a ski hill. The theory is this is better to keep people where they want to be instead of traveling to the slopes.

Arlo Stockham, TRPA regional planning coordinator, said, "It can't change the character of the recreation area."

How development would not change the character was not explained by anyone at TRPA.

"This is how sprawl happens," Ann Nichols, a resident of the basin, told the board of putting commercial or residential structures in recreation areas.

Board member Nancy McDermid, who is also on the Douglas County Commission, envisions the change being beneficial because a trail currently cannot be built on land designated conservation. This means her county cannot turn the Pony Express Trail into a hiking trail in the Stateline area because the land it would go through is deemed conservation. She pointed out a skeet shooting range is allowed on conservation land.

Board member Clem Shute, though, said 90 areas in the basin would be affected by changing the rules, not just the land Edgewood Companies owns. For that reason he believes there is plenty of room for debate.

Nichols is also concerned about increasing the height limit to 197 feet.

TRPA wants that allowance for select areas, primarily the

Stateline casino core where the buildings are already that tall. Until those structures comply with standards, they cannot be renovated. Grandfathering them in doesn't work, so the rules have to change to meet their current height. It's not like the building owners can lop off a few floors to come into compliance.

Another hot button issue has been what are called "bonus units" that people who have development rights in sensitive areas might be able to tap into so construction doesn't occur on those plots but would instead be in the town centers.

Stockham did not explain where that second, or bonus, parcel would come from.

Pat Davidson, with a contractors association in Truckee, praised staff for answering questions at the open house. However, she said her group would be submitting formal comments that pertain to the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements and air mitigation rules.

Dave McClure with the North Tahoe Citizens Action Committee and Steve Teshara with Tahoe Transportation District disagreed about whether California's SB375 is relevant when it comes to sustainable practices. McClure says it's not applicable to Tahoe, while Teshara says using it is the only way to meet green house gas emission requirements.

Shute said a group of Nevada and California stakeholders have been having informal meetings to try to work out details that had divided the Regional Plan committee. These meetings are not open to the public.

While there is a preferred alternative in the environmental impact statement – No. 3 – it is not something the board members all agree on; that is why more behind-the-scenes dialog is going on. Part of the discussions deal with Nevada Senate Bill 271.

SB271 was passed nearly a year ago by Nevada. It calls for changes in the TRPA Compact or the Silver State would withdraw.

Shute said the goal is the people in his group want consensus in July, and before the August environmental summit. At the 2011 summit it was essentially promised to Govs. Jerry Brown and Brian Sandoval that the TRPA would have a Regional Plan in place by the end of 2012.

This morning at 9:30 the Governing Board will resume the May 23 meeting at the Stateline office. This is another opportunity for people to comment on the documents related to the Regional Plan update. The last day to comment on the environmental impact statement is June 28.

Two workshops a month are likely to be put on in July-September. The topics will be ones that seem to be generating the most public interest.

Groups that want to meet with TRPA staff regarding the plan are welcome to set up a meeting. Executive Director Joanne Marchetta mentioned how the League to Save Lake Tahoe and the Nevada Conservation League have sat down with staff.

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Dates to know:

- May 24, 9:30am: TRPA Governing Board meeting public hearings, TRPA office, 128 Market St., Stateline.
- June 11, 9:30am: Advisory Planning Commission public hearings, TRPA office, 128 Market St., Stateline.
- June 27, 9:30am: TRPA Governing Board public hearings, North Tahoe Events Center, 8318 North Lake Blvd., Kings Beach.

- June 28, 9:30am: TRPA Governing Board public hearings, TRPA office, 128 Market St., Stateline.

Other vital info:

The public comment period runs through June 28 for the environmental impact statements for the draft Regional Plan update and Regional Transportation Plan. Send comments to regionalplancomments@trpa.org or to mobility2035comments@trpa.org for the Regional Transportation Plan.

All of the documents are on the TRPA website. Fact sheets that summarize the key elements are also on the website.

Comments on the Regional Plan (not the environmental documents) will be taken until the board votes in December.