

Opinion: Teamwork allowed Lakeview Commons to succeed

By Deb Vreeland

Does it take a vision or does it start with a vision?

South Lake Tahoe, clearly a jewel in its own right, was feeling lackluster. There was no sense of place. No central gathering area. A lack of community, some said. It's easy to pontificate on making things better – even easier to reflect on the good ole days.

But what wasn't easy at all, was *reaching consensus on what the passion of the people in a particular place would do with a prime piece of public open space and the funding to make it a special place.*



Deb Vreeland's leadership helped get Lakeview Commons through planning and design.
Photo/LTN

So with far less fanfare than sheer will, a small group of individuals came together. And they kept coming together. They talked about what had transformed on the North Shore and what things looked like in other places across the country. And what things *could* look like here.

In all honesty, I don't recall the details of who all the "right" people were or where the vision and passion started, or who is or was the main catalyst for making something happen. But I do know that by the time I came into the picture, there were clearly leaders who had an idea that something needed to happen. And perhaps most critical, they had identified funding sources for making something happen. Regrettably, there were far more naysayers and "this will never happen'" philosophizers than there were visionaries. But that's what helps make Lakeview Commons so much the success it is today.

So here we are: we have funding, we have the city and county partnering on a project, and we have volunteers who are driven to seeing the vision become a reality. I was still, at this point, on the periphery. I had dubious thoughts of my own; but I was impressed with the momentum. There was drive to make something happen, and I was honored to be asked to help see this "thing" become something. My role was to manage the process. This meant seeing that all the parts and pieces came together – on time and on budget. And the overall responsibility was making certain the vision became something you could see and touch.

When the California Tahoe Conservancy organized and orchestrated a design charette, the wheels were in motion. Top design firms sent their best and brightest to South Lake Tahoe with briefcases of colored pencils, reams of blank drawing paper, and lots of creative design power. With real-time input from community members who interacted with the designers, four vastly different design concepts were unveiled in a packed public forum. Wow! The things that could be done with this place were almost incomprehensible.

The conceptual design from Royston, Hanamoto, Alley & Abey of Mill Valley was selected for implementation, and they were contracted to develop the concepts into engineering drawings that could ultimately be funded and built. It is safe to say

no one really grasped at this point how the 56 acres of developed land that was begging for improvement would ever be transformed. And it is also clear, upon reflection, that most of us involved had no idea that something real would be built sooner than anyone expected – and on the beach no less.

Suffice it to say that whoever birthed the idea of a steering committee was – at that moment in time or forever – brilliant. Volunteers who demonstrated their willingness to devote time and energy into making a vision a reality were recruited and put to work. They spent hours reviewing designs, providing input and feedback, and simply being present at an extraordinary number of public meetings, all of which were dipping into their own personal time. After getting to know each of them individually throughout the process, I think it's safe to say that they are rewarded for every minute they spent to see this project become the reality it is today.

At this point in time, we – the steering committee, the RHAA design team, Kathay Lovell, Norma Santiago, Ray Lacey, Peter Eichar, and far too many other individuals who never missed a step of this process – were coming together on a regular basis, driving ourselves by deadlines, and working cohesively to see a plan become a project and then become a place. The dedicated public made their voices heard. They were explicit in what they wanted and what they needed. The designers drafted and redrafted. All the while, cost estimates were refined and nailed down. All of this activity took place over many months, but it never languished. We pushed and sometimes prodded and, over time, the vision crystallized.

With the dedicated support of the California Tahoe Conservancy leaders and the cooperative team work of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and other agency representatives, the budget, the permits, and a plan for construction came together. The plans were approved and a construction bid document was prepared. The planning, permitting and design phase was not complete. A hand off to the construction team was next.

What took somewhere on the order of four plus years to conceive, create, convince and construct was finally a reality and no longer a vision. A true example of dedication, collaboration and a willingness to believe is now resting majestically on the South Shore of Lake Tahoe – for everyone to enjoy.

Revel in it!

Deb Vreeland was project manager through the planning phase of Lakeview Commons. Prior commitments will keep her from today's 2pm dedication.