

Opinion: North and South Shore chambers plot Tahoe's future

By Casey Blann

As a long-time resident of Lake Tahoe, my family and I have witnessed many changes. In fact, I am a strong proponent of change as it challenges status quo and requires us to look at situations in a whole new way; but it can also bring fear to some. It has been my experience that the only way to address these fears is through education.

Possessing the necessary information to make educated decisions has always been a challenge in Tahoe. Often, we are reading information from a variety of sources and it is impossible to determine whether it is factual, or biased. Faced with this situation, we decided to create a website that spoke to the scientific and verifiable facts of the issues that are facing us in the very near future; this site is TahoeFuture.org.

The TahoeChamber, (in conjunction with the North Lake Tahoe Chamber) have launched the regionwide campaign to help better inform the people of Lake Tahoe. The concept is simple – to get more people in-the-know in the most user-friendly way possible. Basically, we want more people to have a voice in Tahoe's critical planning issues to create a brighter future for Lake Tahoe. The focal point is the TahoeFuture.org website which will quickly link community members to easy-to-understand, straightforward information streamlining "getting involved".



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Over the next seven months, TahoeFuture.org will connect people to important information on two critical land use and transportation plans that create a blueprint for a revitalized Lake Tahoe. The overarching goal of these two plans, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Regional Plan Update (RPU) and Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)/Mobility 2035, is to restore Lake Tahoe.

The draft environmental impact statement period for the RPU and RTP closed June 28. More than 70 people participated via speaking at hearings and writing letters to TRPA. Over the next few months, public comment in person and in writing will continue to be accepted on both plans.

We know the South Shore is sorely in need of change. And as many locals already know, there's a movement under way via various efforts, all around Lake Tahoe to shift the direction of Lake Tahoe away from one of continued decline toward one of environmental and human health, prosperity and sustainability. TahoeFuture.org is linked directly to these numerous efforts happening simultaneously around Lake Tahoe to chart a new direction.

The new direction and brighter future is about effectively integrating accelerated environmental restoration with community revitalization and a new economic model for prosperity for residents, second homeowners and visitors.

Lake Tahoe continues to suffer from damaging runoff and one of the worst periods of economic decline in its history. The environment and the economy are intertwined; and without change, the lake's clarity and the future of the region remain

in serious peril. We must do something about it. Take a look at some facts:

- 72 percent of the fine sediment and pollutants clouding Tahoe's water clarity are the result of untreated runoff from the old built environment (before water quality standards were put in place) of roadways and aging infrastructure.
- The economic decline started in 1997 at Lake Tahoe and unemployment rates have averaged 16 percent for the past three years. Due to the loss of jobs and local services, families have opted to move. The result has been a 15 percent drop in permanent population (and still falling) and a sharp decrease in business levels. In 2011, the average occupancy rate for Lake Tahoe lodging properties – large and small combined – was 30 percent or less. In short, the outlook for our future is anything but bright.

Here's a quick description of additional collaborative efforts going on around the Region which are all aimed at fixing the mistakes of the past in order to achieve the goal of a healthier Lake Tahoe.

Regional Plan Update (RPU) is a blueprint for innovative, smart land use and transportation policy. About 4,500 citizens provided input that ultimately guided the TRPA RPU. The overarching objective is to restore Lake Tahoe and deliver environmental gains through a host of policy changes such as incentives for environmental redevelopment and the removal of existing development from the most sensitive areas. Expected to be approved at the end of 2012, its innovative new approaches include: creating livable walkable town centers, moving away from burdensome regulations that inhibit environmental redevelopment gains and investment in efforts to clean up blighted areas that have contributed to economic and environmental decline over the past 30 years. As a foundation for this effort, TRPA will maintain the existing regional growth control systems that stopped the rampant

overdevelopment that was a product of the 1960s and early 1970s.

Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)/Mobility 2035 is a blueprint for connecting communities and stopping pollution impacts. In conjunction with the RPU, the RTP/Mobility 2035 is being updated to support the goals of improving lake clarity and air quality by boosting alternative forms of transportation as well as reconfiguring communities to be more walkable. Highlights of the Mobility 2035 Plan include: implementation of 160 miles of new bicycle and walking trails, programs to catch sediment on approximately 78 miles of roads and garnering federal and state transportation investments.

Tahoe Prosperity Center is a regionwide collaborative economic prosperity strategy for enhancing environmental quality and living standards for all residents. The plan aims to move the region away from a gaming and tourism only reliant model to one that focuses on three clusters: Outdoor Recreation-based Tourism; Health and Wellness; and Environmental Innovation. Board members are developing strategies related to their region-wide 'pillar initiatives' to drive leadership, planning and policy, infrastructure, capital generation and economic development.

Pathways to Prosperity Trek took local leaders to study comparable community models for inspiration. We visited other communities that have faced similar challenges and in response, have implemented smart, creative, collaborative solutions to turn their region around. Specifically, when Monterey and Livermore faced economic and community decline, local political and community leaders took bold steps to reverse this decline including the development of a new economy (geotourism and downtown revitalization) along with transportation and community improvements. 2012 Trekkers represented a diverse group of Tahoe basin leaders across various sectors including tourism, science, government, transportation, economic, business, health care, and

recreation.

I believe now is the time for more people to get involved and join this energizing momentum toward positive change. Together we can bring back our economic wellbeing and chart the path toward environmental improvements and community vitality.

I invite each and every person who cares about Lake Tahoe to visit TahoeFuture and become more informed and involved. Let's work together and actively participate in the process to build a healthier Lake Tahoe future. Let's make Lake Tahoe more walkable and bikeable and maybe it will be a place where our kids can return to work, play and raise a family.

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