

S. Tahoe council slow to make substantive decisions

By Kathryn Reed

For a City Council that claims it wants change, it is slow to take action to back up all that talk.



Hours and hours of chatter is what Tuesday was all about. South Lake Tahoe Mayor Claire Fortier started the proceedings with a lengthy speech about the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Regional Plan update. (No one from the TRPA was in the audience.)

Then the conversation turned to prioritization of area plans. The council, after hours of discussion, couldn't pick a plan to study.

This was followed by what turned into a heated debate about the loop road, where at one time Councilwoman Angela Swanson accused some of her colleagues of being "nimbyistic and racist" for wanting to alter the alignment into a poorer area of town.

Then after the vote was taken to "strongly recommend" the Tahoe Transportation District board take the alternative that has been proposed off the table, Councilman Hal Cole caved. Then he waffled on the cave.

Well past the lunch hour and not breaking, the council then jumped into discussing the Harrison Avenue project. They seemed surprised to learn property owners expected the city to front their portion, which would be paid back over 20 years with interest. But *Lake Tahoe News* knew this. The council still has to decide if it wants to be a bank of sorts for this project.

As for the area plans – those are what planning documents are expected to be called in the Regional Plan update. (That document could be before the TRPA Governing Board in November.) It remains to be seen how the council will proceed. With the city's staff being gutted, only one plan can be done at a time unless an outside consultant is hired. The two areas of town being considered are the Y and Stateline.

The Tahoe Valley Community Plan – community plans are the old way of doing business – was never finished. It's been sitting around since 2003. City staff thinks an environmental impact report can be done for \$150,000, but those with more experience in these matters tell *Lake Tahoe News* that figure is laughably low.

The Stateline plan does not need the enviro docs, so it would definitely be cheaper to complete and faster. Plus, it would dovetail into the other planning going on in that section of town.

In the end, the council asked staff to come back with the cost and timeline to do both simultaneously.

The vote regarding the loop road had Councilmen Cole, Tom Davis and Bruce Grego winning – meaning a letter will be written to the TTD board telling them to no longer study the alternative they first proposed. Of course the TTD board can completely disregard the letter and do what it wants. Fortier dissented. Swanson abstained – saying she didn't want her personal vote to be misconstrued when she went to the TTD board and voted the voice of the council and not of herself.

The TTD board at its Sept. 14 meeting said it was starting fresh, but that the alternative on the table will stay on the table – just not as the preferred alternative.

Then Cole wanted to reconsider his vote. Then he decided he didn't want to. He has 48 hours from the time of the vote to make up his mind.

As for Harrison Avenue, the project is moving forward. For the residents who are miffed about the one-way streets that are in the plans, they will get to voice their concerns at a special meeting in October that has yet to be finalized.