

Tahoe City visionaries talking about overhauling the town

By Kathryn Reed

TAHOE CITY – A hotel where Safeway is as well as one along the golf course. Residences above street level businesses. Side streets with commercial offerings instead of just along the highway. Expanded recreation. Improved public transit.

Those are some of the visions a group of business owners and others have for Tahoe City. Their vision was unveiled at a standing-room-only meeting of more than 80 people on Sept. 27 at Granlibakken resort.

“For me, things have changed a lot,” Douglas Dale, who has owned Wolfdale’s restaurant for 34 years, said. Mostly the change is in the winter. “I can barely break even, if I do. The mousetraps of Squaw Valley and Northstar have done us in.”



This is one vision for a section of Tahoe City. Rendering/Design Workshop

Skiers are staying at those resorts in the winter and no longer venture into Tahoe City.

It also didn't help that when the villages opened they lured Tahoe City businesses to their locations with the promise of free rent – some for a year. Then when the rents were established they kept going up and many of those original Tahoe City businesses are nowhere to be found. But what can be found are empty storefronts in the villages and in town.

Some of the visuals that were presented on easels Thursday night portrayed a Tahoe City larger and more developed than what exists now. A connectivity, though, between the sectors, with more open space and access to Lake Tahoe were also illustrated.

One of the goals would be to tap into what is expected to be an overhaul of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Regional Plan – which is expected to be adopted later this year – to allow for mixed uses and increased building height.

“What gets our dander up is high-rises on the lake. That is the difference between us and the South Shore,” Mary Cushing said.

Sue Daniels, a Realtor in Tahoe City, told the group, “There is a myth in society that bigger is better. It's important to keep that in mind. Our population is much, much larger than it was in the 1960s. Yes, it's gone down since the 1980s. This has happened across the nation. We can fix this town without five stories on the lake.”

She was one of several people who took issue with the speakers saying more lake access is crucial, but then said it might be for the tourists via a hotel room.

Richard Shaw, who works out of the Aspen office of Design Workshop, was at the meeting to explain some of the concepts that have been developed. (He is also the main man at Design Workshop behind the South Shore vision process.)

He said the primary challenges facing Tahoe City are:

- Almost the whole downtown is built on a stream environmental zone;
- Decline in full-time residents;
- No hotel rooms in the prime areas where tourists want to be;
- Decline in market share;
- Small parcels have multiple owners.

Dale, along with Roger Kahn whose family ran Porters Sports for years, Brendan Madigan of Alpenglow Sports, Gary Davis of Gary Davis Engineers, Wally Auerbach of Auerbach Engineers and Steve Hoch, executive director of the Tahoe City Downtown Association, were the primary speakers during the more than two-hour high-energy gathering.

Business owners, TCDA, Tahoe City Public Utility District and North Lake Tahoe Resort Association hired Design Workshop for about \$35,000 to help develop a vision for the North Shore community.

Business reps pointed to the large amount of public money spent on improving aspects of town – like Commons Beach, bike trails and other infrastructure, but admitted the private sector has not done its part to reinvest in the community.

It was said many times at the Thursday meeting how Tahoe City does not want to resemble present day South Shore, or either of the villages at Squaw or Northstar. But it was also clear that a consensus on what the future of this town of 1,557 should look like was not going to be decided at one meeting. (The population, according the U.S. Census Bureau dropped 11.6 percent from the 1,761 in 2000 to the 2010 figure.)

It was also stressed that what was being talked about was a vision, not a plan. And it was reiterated that more meetings, discussions, input and other visions are being sought.

The North Lake Tahoe Resort Association expects to have information about the vision on its website.