

Opinion: Ask questions before forcing change on people

By Kathryn Reed

The problem with the sentiment – If you aren't part of the solution, you are part of the problem – is that you might not agree with the solutions being presented. That, in my opinion, does not make you part of the problem.

That is one of the problems with some of the people in the Lake Tahoe Basin. They have a vision – be it for the South Shore, Tahoe City, Incline Village, Homewood, Kings Beach, you name it – and they expect everyone to jump on board. And when you don't jump on board, you are accused of being part of the problem and/or of wanting the status quo.

Wanting the status quo is a valid opinion. It might be working for someone even if it is not working for you.

Not being engaged is being part of the problem. And whining anonymously on *Lake Tahoe News* is barely being engaged – in my opinion.

People need to explain why they want or don't want something to happen. It's not that more studies need to be done. But people really need to start proving their ideas are valid. Showing pretty pictures is not enough. Saying someone wanted it in the 1980s is not a reason to do it 30 years later. And then they need to listen to those who disagree. And the dissenters in turn need to make a case for their ideas or a case for why the status quo is OK.

When it comes to the loop road on the South Shore someone asked me to name another town where a state highway goes through it where that city is doing well.

Solvang. That's my answer. I visited this Central Coast city last month for the first time.

A disclaimer – it's not an apples to apples comparison; I don't know if any city is enough like another to have that apples to apples analysis.

But here goes – Solvang is a tourist town with a state highway through it. But the speed limit is much lower than South Lake Tahoe's. That is where I think South Lake Tahoe needs to make a change. It needs to work on its legislators to lower the speed limit – to get Caltrans to change the policy of how it determines the speed limit. (And this suggestion is coming from someone with a bit of a lead foot.)

In Solvang, the sidewalks are wide. Has anyone noticed how narrow the sidewalks are in South Lake Tahoe that Caltrans has put in? Our sidewalks need to be wider – like Ski Run Boulevard, Linear Park, Heavenly Village.

I didn't see any paid parking in Solvang. Cars were parked on the main street and some of the businesses had parking in front of their places.

I noticed fewer ingresses and egresses – so as a pedestrian I didn't feel like I was about to get hit. Could property owners in the basin work together to share driveways?

A big difference between all the towns in the basin and Solvang is how they are laid out. The basin towns are linear. Solvang is on more of a grid, with several streets easy to walk up and down. The vision some have for Tahoe City is for businesses to go off the main drag of Highway 28. This would create a more pedestrian-friendly town like Solvang. If the types of businesses changed near Stateline, that's what South Lake Tahoe could have, too.

Solvang didn't have a single bike rack that I saw. I'm pretty sure we locked our bikes illegally.

However, I was not scared to ride my bike on that state highway. I can't say the same for any of the highways in the basin. I'm scared to be on two wheels on Tahoe's highways.

I didn't see any empty buildings in Solvang. This gave the appearance of a thriving economy. The opposite is going on in Tahoe.

How the built environment looks in parts of Lake Tahoe is atrocious. That is what needs to change.

But we also need to change the mindset of how much money we are going to make. The ledgers from the 1980s are history and are not likely to be repeated. It's time to adjust to that.

It is also time to accept that nearly every place else in the world has tourism as part of its economy. That means the traveler perceives there are more places to visit. That would likely mean fewer repeat visitors to Lake Tahoe.

When I was in England this summer a taxi driver said he likes to ski at Heavenly. But then he said something like, "But there really isn't anything to do in Tahoe in the winter if you don't ski." I paused. Then I agreed with him.

He nailed it. Not only is the Lake Tahoe Basin dependent on tourists, but also we only attract one kind in the winter – the kind who plays in the snow. And last winter we had no snow so we had no visitors.

To me, to stop the downward spiral, these are questions that need to be asked and answered of those who live, work and play in Tahoe, as well as those who own property and businesses:

- What improvements do you want to make to your property and/or business and why aren't you?
- Are you satisfied with how your property looks?
- Are you willing to join a business district like Ski Run

Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe created in order to establish a pot of cash for improvements to your area?

- Would you be willing to donate X number of hours a month/year to help another property owner (residential or commercial) to make improvements to their property so the cost of labor is eliminated or greatly decreased?

- What are you doing to market your business to locals and/or people outside the area? Do you know what the return on investment is? Would it be better to pool your resources – say all the restaurants in an area – to showcase the variety that is available?

- What are you doing to make Lake Tahoe a better place to live, work and play?

- What activities/events need to occur throughout the year to get locals engaged and tourists in beds?

(Note: I'm on the fence about the loop road. No one has proven to me that it is going to be better for the entire South Shore. If we eliminated all traffic through that area, I might be able to have a definitive opinion.)