

Opinion: Regional Plan update is just the beginning

By Joanne Marchetta

After years of scientific study and public involvement, the Regional Plan update is headed to the Governing Board of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency for a final vote in December. Depending on the final decision of the board on Dec. 12, a new framework for the environmental protection and restoration of Lake Tahoe could come online in the new year.

The board's vote to approve policy updates that have been vetted over many years is the springboard for Lake Tahoe community members to play the most important part in what you want your unique community to be.



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Like any plan, it is only a path to a promising future, but it is the essential foundation for the next environmental leap forward. That leap will come from tailoring local area plans to the needs of each community around the lake. Because we need to remake what we have in order to protect the lake and its environment, we have now the best opportunity in half a century to rethink the form and function of our town centers.

TRPA has put forward a plan that advances restoration of the lake's clarity and other environmental improvements in part by

refocusing our Agency to the regional level. In doing so, TRPA proposes to transition to an area plan framework that reduces inefficient regulations and improves permit processes by integrating regional environmental threshold attainment with the plans of local governments and other land management agencies.

By now you may have heard about many of the policy updates that TRPA is proposing. The final draft plan includes innovations to make updating our homes and communities more feasible – modest amendments to land coverage accounting for decks on homes with BMPs, along with coverage exemptions for public bike trails and disabled access facilities. TRPA has used every means at our disposal to widely publicize and educate both those within and outside the Basin about the major tenets of the plan. The full draft plan, summaries and fact sheets are all available online and have been since April, along with volumes of public comments that have been responded to and incorporated into the documents that are up for consideration. Use this information to get involved in the final decision because without the plan as a foundation, the next positive steps for Tahoe remain elusive.

Only with the updated plan can communities take the next step to put forth their vision for town centers and get to the important business of place making. The plan creates a framework, but inside the bounds it's not one size fits all – communities don't have to be like one another. We did this in recognition that Kings Beach is not Tahoe City and Incline Village will never be South Shore. Within regional sideboards of environmental improvement and protection, area plans hold the promise to put local planning, local communities, and local destiny into your hands. Now is the time for communities to act collaboratively to fix our environmental, economic, and social problems. Seizing this opportunity is key – with the decision this December, the Tahoe region could have its launch pad for the next quantum leap forward in environmental

protection and overall sustainability for a national treasure.

The level of improvement to Lake Tahoe that is expected from the plan's emphasis on environmental redevelopment also cannot be understated, but like area planning, it is just the beginning of an adaptive management cycle every four years that will safeguard the natural environment by ensuring that unintended consequences do not go unchecked. While support for the Regional Plan update has been broad, we have also taken the concerns we have heard very seriously. Following the advice of conservation groups and state leaders, we have strengthened other safeguards in the plan. Environmental groups such as the League to Save Lake Tahoe and the Nevada Conservation League have been important stakeholders who have worked collaboratively on the plan along with the community advocates, business groups, and partner agencies who have been at the table since the update process began.

Whether you are familiar with the update or are still waiting for your opportunity to get involved, the last few meetings of the year on the Regional Plan are meaningful opportunities for you to be part of Lake Tahoe's future. Thank you for shaping the plan into what we believe will deliver a restored Lake Tahoe and revitalized communities that are more walkable and bikeable.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.