

South Lake Tahoe set to spend \$1 mil. for ladder fire truck

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe's ladder truck is so old that some of the firefighters working for the department were born after it first hit the streets.

Fire Chief Brian Uhler told the City Council on Nov. 6 that the normal life of the vehicle is 15 years. The one the city has title to is 30 years old. In the vehicle world it's an antique, and if it were a person, it would be in a convalescent home on life support.



A ladder truck, like the one Tahoe Douglas brought to the Pioneer Trail fire this fall, allows crews to get above power lines.

Photo/LTN

The ladder truck is in such lousy shape that it was pulled from service this year because of safety concerns and high maintenance costs.

In the last five years, the current ladder truck has needed almost \$100,000 in repairs.

“The vehicle emits a large amount of smoke because a major engine overhaul is overdue and the ladder’s electrical components are known to be unreliable,” Uhler wrote in his staff report.

Rob Hembree, one of the station commanders, pointed out how when the convention center project was approved, it was with the caveat the city had a ladder truck that could fight a fire at that structure.

The tallest building in the city limits is nine stories.

But it’s not just tall structures that benefit from a ladder truck. The house fire on April Avenue and Pioneer Trail in September was extinguished with the help of Tahoe Douglas’ ladder truck.

This type of unit is ideal for fires at commercial properties. It allows a trench to be cut on a roof without getting on the roof. That can save lives. Having a ladder truck in the city limits could help keep fire insurance costs down, too.

With a room full of firefighters, the council heard from official spokesmen from the department as well as impassioned pleas from those working the various rigs.

In the end, the council approved the purchase of a ladder truck for \$1,045,501. It will arrive next year. Another \$75,000 will be spent on renovating Station No. 2 so the vehicle can be parked indoors.

The city has negotiated a loan with Republic First National for 10 years at 3.26 percent interest. The loan payments will

come from Proposition 172 dollars. Until this week, the approximately \$600,000 from this 1992 state initiative went into the city's general fund for fire and police to split.

Now the fire share will be allocated for capital expenditures. This includes vehicles and other equipment the women and men need.

The first payment won't be due until fiscal year 2013-14, so no revisions to the current budget are needed.

It hasn't been decided what the old ladder truck will be used for. It might have a new life as a training apparatus at the fire academy, possibly it will be the truck decorated for the holidays. But it's so old that parts are hard if not impossible to obtain, and the likelihood of another department wanting it are nil, according to officials.

In other action:

- Harrison Avenue improvements are going forward, with 82.46 percent of the property owners agreeing to form an assessment district. The council then unanimously approved its creation. This means work on the streetscape will begin next building season.

- The city and El Dorado County are joining efforts to release a request for proposal to find someone to conduct a comprehensive parks, trails and recreation master plan. Proposals are due Dec. 14, with the council expected to review them in late January and the county in early February.

- The empty lot at the southwest corner of Highway 50 and Ski Run Boulevard has been sold to an undisclosed buyer for \$750,000. The buyer sought the confidentiality clause. The city is holding to it until all the paperwork is signed. The city had to sell this parcel because it was part of the now defunct Redevelopment Agency.

- Stan Sherer, the Community Development director who was let go earlier this year, filed a \$1 million claim against the city. It was reported out from closed session that the council rejected that claim.