

Funding issues force CTC to scale back projects

By Kathryn Reed

Maintaining its nearly 5,000 properties and paying the people to do so are the priorities of the California Tahoe Conservancy in this era of austerity. New projects, while important, are farther down the priority list.

This was the bleak news delivered to the board on Thursday at its meeting at Lake Tahoe Community College.

That is not to say the Conservancy won't be funding projects – just not to the level or at the frequency as some in the Lake Tahoe Basin may have gotten accustomed to.



Almost \$2.3 million has been set aside to buy the Alta Mira building and Johnson Meadow in South Lake Tahoe. The building is at the far end of what is to be the second phase of Lakeview Commons. Demolishing the structure would open a view to the lake and tie the area into the Commons that was completed last year.

About the same amount of cash is being put toward the Sustainable Communities Investment Program.

The CTC's Kevin Prior, who went over the numbers with the board, said this money would be used to acquire coverage outside town centers, tourist accommodation units and commercial floor area. (The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency has made a commodity out of hotel rooms and commercial square footage.)

Just more than \$900,000 is set aside for the South Tahoe Greenway Bike Trail that one day will go from Meyers to

Stateline. The Homewood and Dollar Creek bike trails have \$1 million in CTC funding.

The CTC has budgeted \$1.4 million for restoration of the Upper Truckee River Marsh. That project will be before the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency board on the afternoon of March 27.

The capital outlay budget is expected to drop to less than \$12 million for fiscal year 2014-15. It's just more than double that this fiscal year.

"We can no longer rely on a percentage of bond sales," Executive Director Patrick Wright said.

In the past, bonds were the primary source of the Conservancy's budget. And while a water bond is still being talked about for the 2014 ballot, the original \$100 million earmarked for Lake Tahoe is likely to be dramatically diminished or not exist at all. That is one of the warnings Wright delivered March 21.

Plus, a poll that came out this week shows voters are growing less enamored with the idea of a water bond.

"We hope by 2016 one or more new funding sources will come through," Wright said.

The CTC divides its pot of money into two main categories – support and capital. The former deals with salaries, maintaining its assets – this includes fuel reduction projects, and the day-to-day operations of the agency. The capital budget is for acquisition of property and upgrading those parcels.

The support budget, which for 2013-14 is slated to be just less than \$5 million, comes largely from license plate revenues. The CTC gets money from the Tahoe specialty plate as well as the environmental license plate fund.

A marketing campaign has the goal of increasing the \$1.2

million Tahoe plate revenue by 10 percent in the next year. Instead of going after individuals, the CTC wants to get companies to buy into the program. About 30,000 vehicles in the state have the Tahoe plate.

The Conservancy also recognizes it has not done a great job in educating people about how the bike trails and other projects are the result of the those new and annual renewals of the specialty plate.