

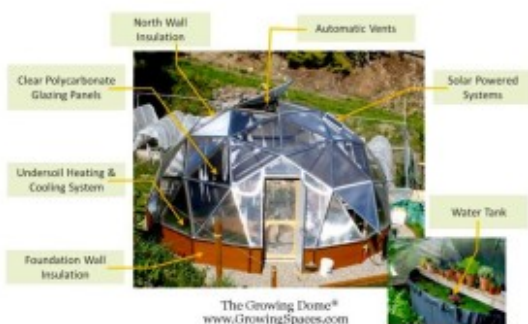
# Growing dome at SHES on shaky ground

By Kathryn Reed

Advocates for a growing dome at Sierra House Elementary School have discovered they need to nurture their idea a bit more for it to sprout into a reality.

This means learning that permits are needed, a thing called coverage is an issue in the Lake Tahoe Basin, that the school board needs to OK something like this and the state gets a say, too. It also means finally admitting the Truckee dome that has been highly touted as a model is not on a school site – that it is actually on private property.

People have been working on this greenhouse of sorts for a year and just now came to the school board. But it was only on presentation Tuesday night and not something to vote on.



What the dome at Sierra House might look like.

Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe was under the impression the school had all the necessary permits and approvals in place to erect the dome on the South Shore campus. Wrong.

And because the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board has

yet to approve the structure, let alone the Division of State Architect signing off on the project, the Soroptimist will not be handing over the \$25,000 check at lunch today as was expected.

Based on SHES Principal Ryan Galles' presentation to the school board on March 26, the dome advocates' input and board member Sue Novasel's comments, today's action will come as a surprise. And Novasel is the incoming president of Soroptimist.

Soroptimist told *Lake Tahoe News* prior to the school board meeting that its board would discuss at its meeting next week how to proceed. It's possible the money could be set aside for one fiscal year with the anticipation the dome people will get the necessary approvals. It's also possible the Soroptimist board will distribute the money to another organization.

While the school board said it likes the concept of the greenhouse, the members all want more info before saying build it.

Galles told the board how the dome would have multiple educational purposes. For one, it would be a hands-on science lab where students would be growing vegetables year-round. It would complement the composting program that was started this year. It would show kids that food comes from someplace else before it reaches a grocery store. And it will give them something healthy to eat. The state has curriculum in its Garden in Every School program that could be used.

"It will build lifelong healthy habits, not just with kids, but with families," Galles said.

About one-third of the full boardroom was comprised of people who were there solely to show their support for the dome.

School district officials said the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency supports the dome project.

TRPA told *Lake Tahoe News* planners have gone over drawings and specs with the dome people, and told them what to include with their application. But no application has been submitted.

A soil analysis needs to be done, still.

Steve Morales, LTUSD facilities director, said even though Sierra House is out of coverage, that issue can be resolved. But he said the board would need to consider what the future for the school is in terms of coverage for other structures.

He explained to the advocates how the state works. And with the millions of dollars LTUSD has put into facilities in the last few years Morales is intimately familiar with the process.

And while the advocates said they know politicians who are on their side, they seemed to forget they were addressing five elected officials. Morales and other staff pointed out the state Division of State Architect doesn't bend to political pressure, but instead follows stringent guidelines.

Morales will be working with the advocates to get the state what it needs.

The dome group has revised its budget to be close to \$100,000 for permitting and to meet the state's needs. Of the \$36,500 Galles told the board is in the bank, the reality is \$25,000 of that is from the Soroptimist. And now that is on hold.

So, even if the district and state give a green thumbs up to the dome, the money to build it, operate it and maintain it still needs to be secured.