

Opinion: South Tahoe looks great compared to Stateline

By JoAnn Conner

Being an elected official can be difficult. No surprise there, but sometimes our “job” blends with the fact that we are also individuals and residents of this community. As such, I have been doing a lot of reflection lately, and there are a few observations I would like to share.

I have heard repeatedly that our town, not South Shore, but the city of South Lake Tahoe is drab, dirty and stuck in the past. I have heard, primarily from outside sources, that we are not doing anything to improve our town and it is dying. Really? In the past few years, in spite of a down economy, our little town has accomplished some amazing achievements:



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- Lakeview Commons. No one can say it is not one of the most beautiful, free public access points on the entire lake.
- The Harrison Avenue project is moving forward to revitalize the business core next to Lakeview Commons, and includes more walkable and bikeable areas.
- Bike trails have been built, not just along the streets, but paths with scenic quality, and more are coming this summer, along with much needed repair.

- Sidewalks on Highway 50 from the Y to the corner of Pioneer and Highway 50, initiated by the city, are being built by Caltrans to join the sidewalks already in place near Stateline. Those sidewalks are scheduled to round the corner and proceed down Pioneer Trail to Larch Avenue, then to Ski Run Boulevard. Definite steps to a walkable and bikable community.
- In regards to transportation, the city of South Lake Tahoe, with some service club partnerships, has installed bus shelters to help protect those who travel by bus.
- Lake Tahoe Airport has received millions of dollars from the FAA because of the determination of city government to rebuild its runway and tarmac area to ready it for the return of commercial service and keep it active for private and emergency service.
- The Village Center and the Heavenly Village areas, all on the California side of the "tourist core," have been renovated, are walkable and bikable, and provide a variety of experiences, from shopping, to ice skating, to dining outside.
- The Ski Run BID is alive and well, with help from the city and funds from the California Tahoe Conservancy. The farmers' markets in the summer are wonderful and well attended by locals and visitors alike.
- The city has adopted its own General Plan that is consistent with goals in the TRPA Regional Plan. We do review it, and we have made progress.
- Neighborhood meetings have been established and citizens invited to participate to gain input and consensus on a variety of important issues.
- Our area plans for the Y and Stateline are being advanced to encourage local economic growth and prosperity for existing businesses within South Lake Tahoe.

- The city government continues to make storm drainage improvements throughout South Lake Tahoe, as well as funding road resurfacing and repair projects for the whole community. We know more work is needed.
- We are working on a linear park near Wildwood and Highway 50.
- Bijou Park successfully hosts several community events per year, including the upcoming Earth Day.
- We have torn down some older buildings and built affordable housing, the most recent of which, The Aspens, is due to begin construction this building season.
- Our community college has added buildings and has one of the best fire academies in the state, if not the nation. It is working toward becoming a four-year college.
- The city and Recreation JPA are working in partnership with Lake Tahoe Unified School District to repair our playing fields and build a new one this season.
- The city also partnered with the school district and gave over \$225,000 for the-state-of-the-art track at the recently upgraded middle school.
- Our high school has been renovated and over \$100 million was spent to create a school that is far above most in the state for education, and offers preparation for careers in the arts, work force, and professional fields.
- The city of South Lake Tahoe is working in partnership with Lake Tahoe Unified School District, El Dorado County, and state and national entities to make our schools safer for our children.

I reflected on those that say the entrance to our “tourist core” needs work, and maybe some destruction. And again, I wondered why these things are being said and by whom? In my

opinion, the California side of the "tourist core" looks pretty good, especially comparatively speaking, and we have made as many, if not more, improvements than the other side of "the core." Think about this:

- The Bottle Shop is quaint and historic, and is at least as attractive as Dart Liquor.
- The triangle parcel with 7-Eleven and the Taqueria is much more pleasing and far less offensive than the Lucky Beaver sign, according to input from many of our citizens who drive that corridor.
- Many also feel that the upgraded Holiday Inn Express is certainly more attractive than the Lakeside Inn, with its '70s era shingle siding.
- The entire Heavenly Village and Village Center, in California, with their upgraded shops, ice skating rink, and smokeless access to a quality movie theater are, in my opinion, far more attractive than the casino area of the "tourist core" with their dated exteriors.

Some say we haven't done anything to bring jobs or businesses to the city. We have added Grocery Outlet, Ross, DIY, T.J. Maxx, and Big 5 is coming. These all provide jobs, some above minimum wage, and while some have added a little competition to existing businesses, their existence here have added to the tax base, allowing us to do more, and have helped contain "retail leakage" with more dollars being kept in our town.

The city also helped to bring SnowGlobe here, which, like it or not, still brought a lot of revenue to our businesses. We also have some new light manufacturing.

We have done this as the city of South Lake Tahoe, not South Shore. We don't need our neighbors permission to make improvements and they don't need our permission to do the same. Yes, we still have work to do, but the point is we are

getting it done without funding from the rest of South Shore. Stop the blame game and start fixing up your own backyard.

If you live in a part of the South Shore that wants to expand sidewalks, plant greenways, or renovate buildings, do it. If you want to build bike paths, put in recycling bins, bring better than minimum wage jobs, and replace old buildings with affordable housing, we aren't stopping you.

I have lived in South Lake Tahoe for 32 years, raised my family here, and I am helping to raise the next generation in our town. The best accomplishments and the most significant achievements have come from respect for the work of others, helping your neighbor, and working together. Sometimes you work with your neighbors, and sometimes you've just got to get it done yourself.

The worst effects have been seen when property has been taken (eminent domain), jobs have been lost, families have been devastated, and people start blaming others for their problems. I believe, personally, that most of us want to work together in ways that benefit us all fairly and equally.

We are really good at working together as a community. We have seen that with fundraisers for our sick children, injured community members, and after the Angora Fire. We know how to pull together and get something positive for all.

Please stop listening to outside sources and look around for yourselves. And the next time someone tries to tell you your town looks like garbage, I hope you set them straight.

JoAnn Conner is on the South Lake Tahoe City Council.