

Opinion: Time to improve community participation

By Scott Valentine

I recently wrote an article that highlighted a need for greater community involvement in city issues and I specifically cited the younger generation as being too busy and apathetic to get involved, and the older generation for not appreciating the value of new ideas and welcoming change. I applaud all of you who are doing your part to create positive improvements for our community regardless of age or qualifications. Of course everyone realizes I oversimplified my comments for effect. I'm not age-ist. I am trying to illustrate that change on all sides, and on all accounts is necessary.



Scott
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I openly welcome praise and criticism of my last article (or even this one). My intent is to incite action from those who feel they are underrepresented, be it our youth, members of our Latino community, or even those in our progressive older population who are tired of being lumped in with the people who are fine leaving our town the way it is. The barrage of emails and phone calls I received all had a common theme: People said, "You're right, I recognize we have a problem, what next, and how do I get more involved?" Excellent. Where

do we begin?

I'm not claiming to have all the answers, but here are just a few suggestions:

Move City Council meetings to nights. If Sacramento can conduct all of their council business from 6 to 9pm, why can't we? This would hopefully accomplish three things: 1) it would force city staff and council to be more efficient with their time (yes, we could all benefit from that), 2) it would allow a vastly different demographic to run for City Council at the next election, and 3) it would allow people the opportunity to participate in city issues after work, thereby increasing the likelihood of public involvement and community guided decision-making. Of course I understand that we live in a town where a lot of people work at night and we wouldn't be satisfying all groups. We also run the risk of people not showing up anyways, no matter what time it is ... it's Tahoe, people are recreating and working three jobs and will most likely be too tired to care at the end of the day ... but it might be worth a shot.

Paid positions. If you want even a more radical approach, maybe we should think about paying our council. We are a small town with a small budget and this might not be feasible, but if this was someone's full-time job instead of a volunteer position we might be able to get a lot of work done in a short amount of time. It would also open the doors for a different pool of applicants when election time rolls around. Someone who is trying to raise a family while holding down multiple jobs might see this as a way to live their Tahoe lifestyle and make positive contributions to the community at the same time. Could it also lead to abuse of taxpayer funds ... maybe ... you'd have to weigh the options.

Get informed. If we seriously want to create community improvements that are based upon public involvement and input, information dissemination is probably the most important part

of the equation. We need a “one-stop-shop” for all of our favorite Tahoe issues. Posting on the city website or on *Lake Tahoe News* is not enough. There needs to be a site where you can instantly see a community calendar of events and important meetings that are happening regionwide. Ideally, it would be a place where you could log in, select the issues that are most important to you, and be instantly emailed/Tweeted/Facebooked about upcoming events. It would be great if the information came to you and was catered to your interests. TahoeFuture.org can help keep you informed. It was initially created to provide information on the TRPA Regional Plan Update and it has since been adapted to serve community needs and provide information on Tahoe issues. Hopefully, we will soon see some survey based functions so that our decision-makers can use the same site to see how the public feels about particular issues, thereby guiding them on how they should vote and create policy. Get informed. Get involved. Visit TahoeFuture.org.

Contact your representatives. I was recently appointed to the Parks and Recreation Commission and I hope to get your input so that we can guide the development of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Help improve our quality of life, increase connectivity, and build a greater sense of community through our recreation facilities and events. Guide this master plan so that it reflects your future desires. I look forward to hearing from you so that we can better serve the needs of our residents and our visitors. valentine@ltcc.edu

Contact the city. If you have other great ideas on how to inspire or improve community participation (or you would like to get involved yourself), you can always contact our City Council or the city manager directly. They actually listen. We live in a small town. A lot is possible if you put forth the effort.

Change is a product of your involvement. Well focused complaints are OK, positive action is even better. Show you are proud of where you live and you are ready to do something

about it. Shovel the sidewalk in front of your business, go to a public meeting, write an informed letter to Council, pick up the trash or the dog poop on your favorite trail, fix your dilapidated sign, tell a tourist where the best restaurants are, volunteer with TAMBA to build some mountain bike jumps, or show Chris Brackett that you are ready to take him on in the next Christmas light competition. Don't ever let anyone tell you that you are unqualified or inexperienced. You are capable of effecting positive change on a variety of levels. Our town is waiting.

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