

Past decisions add to S. Tahoe's Linear Park costs

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe is balking over the \$35,000 connection fee the water district is imposing in order for there to be ample water to irrigate Linear Park.

This stretch along Highway 50 isn't really a park, but instead a paved path with landscaping from McDonald's to Holiday Inn Express in front of the gated Tahoe Meadows neighborhood. It once looked better than it does now, but plants died without enough moisture and then the lights got kicked in, which contributed to the dilapidated look of the area.

In 2004, the now defunct Core 24 Charities had landscape plans drawn up for the area and secured a free connection for the 2-inch waterline from South Tahoe Public Utility District.



Linear Park in South Lake Tahoe will get a makeover this summer. Photo/LTN file

South Tahoe PUD saw this as a demonstration project to show how native landscaping can work in Tahoe with minimal water use and a way to promote its turf buy-back program.

(Core 24 morphed from the inaugural Leadership Lake Tahoe

class that at the time was a product of the two chambers of commerce that later merged to become the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce. Duane Wallace was the head of one of the chambers and on the STPUD board, STPUD spokesman Dennis Cocking was in LLT and Core 24, as was this reporter. When Core 24 dissolved, it gave the city \$22,000 to be used solely for Linear Park.)

Former City Manager Dave Jinkens later traded that free connection for water at city facilities.

And with the current landscape design by Brett Long, the same person who did Core 24's plans, the city wants lots of grass. This is not what the nonprofit had proposed or what was endorsed by STPUD. This requires larger water lines to accommodate all of the irrigation.

It also means the city now must pay a \$35,000 connection fee. (The whole project will cost about \$770,000.) The City Council on March 19 entered into an agreement with Herback General Engineering to do the work.

The California Tahoe Conservancy paid for most of the work the first time, but they aren't allowed to use taxpayer money on do-overs.

Mayor Tom Davis pulled the item from the consent agenda and then went on a rant about how horrible STPUD is for charging connection fees.

The district, which was not at the meeting, told *Lake Tahoe News* afterward the connection fee is about buying into the nearly \$1 billion South Shore water system.

"When people say waive this or that, they are saying all the ratepayers should help pitch in and waive this for project X," STPUD's Cocking said.

The money goes toward future improvements and replacement

costs to the system.

“We are bound by law to charge what are real costs and what the costs of infrastructure are down the road,” Cocking said.

He added that the last time the rates were looked at – 2009 – the consultants recommended an increase. The board keeps saying stick with what’s in place.

But for Davis, he said the fees are “excessive” and “a job killer”.

He said the city doesn’t charge STPUD a fee to have the water and sewer lines under city streets.

When told this, Cocking said the city has altered its rules when it comes to STPUD crews doing repairs and that now more streets are paved by the district than anytime in the past – so the city is charging a fee of sorts.

At the end of the council meeting the five decided to create a new position, where Councilwoman Brooke Laine will be the city’s rep who will go to STPUD meetings and report back what is going on.

In other action:

- City Manager Nancy Kerry was given an “excellent review” by the council, according to the mayor. No changes were made to her contract.
- Aaron Abrams and Michael Adlard were awarded the concessionaire contract at Lakeview Commons and Regan Beach. Donna Rise (Aloha Ice Cream) will be the concessionaire at Bijou Park. Both contracts are expected to be for three years.
- The council approved guidelines for special events at Lakeview Commons.
- The five agreed to issue a request for proposals for

signature events at the Commons.

- Councilmembers Davis and JoAnn Conner will work with city staff, Lake Tahoe Community College and the business community to keep SnowGlobe in town. The North Shore is wooing the music promoters. The college board on April 9 will have a debriefing on the 2012 New Year's weekend music festival.