

South Shore trying to unchain itself from economic blight

By Kathryn Reed

For years, people on the South Shore have gathered to give voice to what they want their community to evolve into. Tuesday night was another opportunity to do more of the same.

But it was also a chance to hear from a diverse group about how some of those ideas are now projects in the ground – like Lakeview Commons and Van Sickle Bi-State Park.



Shawn Butler with the California Tahoe Conservancy talks about the bike trails his agency is working on, as well as how Van Sickle Bi-State Park provides easy access to the outdoors to the main bed base on the South Shore. Photo/LTN

A slew of speakers on March 5 updated the nearly 200 people gathered at Embassy Suites South Lake Tahoe about the completed projects, those that are about to begin, what is in the planning stages and what is in the visioning stage. They included:

- B Gorman – Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce
- Joanne Marchetta – Tahoe Regional Planning Agency
- Nancy Kerry – South Lake Tahoe
- Kim Kerr – El Dorado County
- Brandy McMahon – Douglas County
- Russ Pecoraro – Vail Resorts
- Shawn Butler – California Tahoe Conservancy
- Patrick Rhamey – Edgewood Companies
- Lew Feldman – Feldman McLaughlin Thiel (law firm)
- Christian Strobel – Basecamp Hotel
- Chris Proctor – Barton Health (physical therapist)
- Bob Sullivan – South Tahoe High School
- Karen Borges – Lake Tahoe Community College
- Carl Hasty – Tahoe Transportation District
- David Zehnder – Economic & Planning Systems (Sacramento consultant who did loop road financial study).

Their topics ranged from the South Lake Tahoe-El Dorado County recreation plan that is in its infancy, to the two area plans for the South Shore on the respective state line that are on the fast track, to Heavenly ski resort turning the mountain into a year-round playground, to retail being built at the hole this summer with a design that will complement Heavenly Village, to Barton Health eyeing property in Douglas County for a center for orthopedics, to South Tahoe High and Lake Tahoe Community College elevating K-14 education to a level not seen here before.

The overwhelming message was that the South Shore needs to embrace that it is one community and one economy with a focus on recreation.

Collaboration – public and private – was stressed. What that looks like and how much compromise will be necessary in the name of the greater good is a discussion for another night.

The underlying theme is the South Shore is failing – economically and environmentally – and something (or several things) need to change to make the area vibrant.

With the fall being beautiful and snow coming early, people have been coming to Tahoe in greater numbers than they did a year ago. South Lake Tahoe's transient occupancy tax is up 25 percent from October 2012 through January 2013 compared to the same four months a year ago. And the number of room nights rented in January was up nearly 40 percent compared to 2012.

But as was noted at the October forum, the South Shore is losing market share to other entities.

When it was time for each of the 18 tables full of residents, business owners and interested South Shore-ites to talk among themselves they were tasked with coming up with an idea or concept of utmost importance, explain why and how it will have an economic impact on the region.

They ranged from:

- All parties need to be accountable
- More than one project every 10 years must to be completed
- Establish an outdoor music festival that isn't in a parking lot
- Increase transportation beyond Stateline to the Y
- Create year-round employment for college educated people

- Bridge the divide between the various areas of the South Shore
- Find money for projects
- Increase community pride
- Get more people involved
- More trails and make them useable year-round
- Connect to the outside world – nationally and internationally – to get people here
- Become an arts and culture center
- Create a dynamic draw based on what Tahoe already has to bring people here.

This was the second economic forum in five months. Organizers – the Tahoe Prosperity Center, Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce and South Lake Tahoe – plan to have more in the near future.