

Douglas County's Tahoe area plan nearly complete

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – While the South Shore Area Plan for Douglas County doesn't come with a project per se; it is the map for which one could seek approval.

Area plans are the latest requirement by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency per the updated Regional Plan. They will replace jurisdictions' community plans.

The Douglas County Commission on May 16 heard a presentation from Brandy McMahon, the county's senior planner, about the Tahoe plan. The county Planning Commission earlier this month approved the plan. The commissioners are expected to vote June 20. From there the TRPA Governing Board must adopt it.



Douglas County is close to finalizing the South Shore Area Plan. Photo/LTN file

Area plans are in theory supposed to give the five counties and one city in the Lake Tahoe Basin more control over development within their boundaries. Big projects – something like the Edgewood Lodge – would still require TRPA board approval.

Douglas County updated its master plan in 2011. Much of what is contained in the area plan is in the master plan. A big difference is that the land use element needs to be updated.

Much of the plan will address redevelopment because Douglas County – and the basin as a whole – is near build-out. The county has 102 vacant lots at the lake, with an expectation they could all be built on in 17 years.

Area plans, per TRPA, must take into consideration erosion control issues. These are part of the stormwater load reduction principles.

Douglas County has 18 percent of the basin's shoreline and contributes 3 percent of the fine sediment that reaches the lake. It is that fine sediment that scientists say is degrading the clarity of Lake Tahoe.

McMahon said the goal is redevelopment projects will have a water quality component that will mean less sediment reaching the lake with the new building compared to what is on the land today.

Best management practices – or personal and commercial erosion control measures – is something a rep from the League to Save Lake Tahoe told the commissioners it is keeping a close watch on.

"One of the remaining issues is BMP enforcement and who will be taking that on," Shannon Eckmeyer with the League said.

McMahon told the commissioners, "Douglas County has the highest BMP compliance rate in the Tahoe basin."

Attorney Lew Feldman praised the plan.

Tom Hall, whose family has owned property on Kingsbury Grade for decades, also praised the plan even though his property straddles the two Tahoe plans – of which only one is being formulated. The county said down the road that issue would be

addressed.

(Those were the only members of the public to speak Thursday.)

The South Shore Area Plan essentially mimics the area that was outlined in the South Shore Vision Plan. Richard Shaw, who works out of the Aspen office of Design Workshop and the key player of that plan, will be at the commission's June meeting.

Something that was not considered in TRPA's previous Regional Plan was economics and how land use decisions have a dollar value – even a negative value.

McMahon pointed out how in the Tahoe area of Douglas County gaming revenue decreased 38 percent from 2004 to 2011; employment at the casinos fell 52 percent from 2001 to 2011; the population dropped by 22 percent in the decade starting in 2000; school enrollment is down nearly 50 percent from 1990 to 2010; and half the homes are owned by out-of-towners.

"These are troubling trends we would like to reverse," she said.

Planners – at TRPA and the county – as well as others believe area plans will be the tool for which redevelopment will go forward in the Lake Tahoe Basin, which in turn will be a financial stimulus with the construction, as well as sustained economic growth via providing a more attractive place to live and visit.