

TRPA building allocation policy confounds board

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – It was obvious during a lengthy and at times heated discussion Wednesday that the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board does not fully understand the building allocation policy. And they are the policymakers.

After last month's meeting where staff enlightened the board about how 86 of a possible 130 allocations would be doled out, there was a bit of an outcry by local jurisdictions and contractors.

What was introduced at the May 22 meeting was a plan to distribute the remaining 44 allocations. Seventy-five percent will be given to South Lake Tahoe and the four counties at the lake (Douglas, Placer, Washoe and El Dorado) where building takes place. (Carson is also in the basin, but it's all forest.) The remaining 25 percent, or 11 allocations, will be used for sensitive lot retirement and development right transfer programs that TRPA staff will be in charge of.

While this scenario was created in a month, associate planner Patrick Dobbs and other staff members told the board there isn't enough time to alter plans for 2014 because there are more pressing matters to be dealt with. He didn't say what those are.

At one point board member Steve Robinson said, "It's complex. We are asking the public to jump through hoops when we don't understand it. If we have to throw it out and start over, then do so."

Member Nancy McDermid said, "This decreases the ability of local jurisdictions and their residents to have options."

Elizabeth Carmel, who was at her first board meeting, thought the 25 percent figure could be increased because those allocations would better serve the environment.

The point of having allocations is to limit development in the basin. Before the updated Regional Plan was passed last year, 300 residences could be built each year. Executive Director Joanne Marchetta said it was in the 1980s that all 300 were last used.

In 1987, when the previous Regional Plan was adopted, 6,000 allocations were created for the more than 17,000 vacant parcels in the basin. The 2012 plan has 2,600 allocations available for about 4,700 vacant parcels. This comes to the 130 a year. (Government agencies own more parcels today than in 1987.)

Part of the allocation decision process is that jurisdictions get a set number based on a formula that deals with how well they met TRPA mandated environment improvement goals.

Board member Hal Cole has a huge issue with this criterion because he believes it punishes residents who want to build a house on land they own, but are not able to get an allocation based on things that are beyond their control. Instead of a city being punished for not meeting its environmental goals, individuals are hurt based on the jurisdiction not receiving its full allotment of allocations. Cole keeps saying this is unfair and wants staff to change it.

While economics are now supposed to be a factor in decision-making by the board, the lone contractor who spoke Wednesday believes the board is thwarting economic growth. John Adamski said his math shows the reduction of allocations from 300 to 130 year will impact the Lake Tahoe Basin by millions of dollars.

Jennifer Merchant with Placer County told the board that local jurisdictions have been talking since the April meeting, with

the consensus being that all potential allocations should be distributed. She also enlightened the board that staff already takes 10 percent of the allotted allocations for the same pool where the newly created 25 percent of the leftovers will go for sensitive lot transfers. Staff never mentioned this in their spiel.

Merchant said a sensitive lot has not been retired in exchange for an allocation since 2005, so she questions the need to build up that supply.

McDermid said if the 11 allocations are not used this year, then a new system needs to be created.

By the end, the board said the way staff wants to give out the remaining 44 is fine. The Advisory Planning Commission will look at what is proposed and then the Governing Board will vote on it in June.

The board said flexibility needs to be incorporated into future policies

After the meeting, TRPA spokesman Jeff Cowen told *Lake Tahoe News*, "Too much development too fast slams the system and does not allow enough time for mitigation strategies like stormwater and transportation improvements to catch up and then keep up."

But it was said by board members that development on vacant lots is good for the environment because it means people are putting in erosion control measures instead of allowing all of those dirt lots to send sediment into Lake Tahoe. It's fine sediment that TRPA and others say is the biggest contributor to the decline of Lake Tahoe's clarity.