

Opinion: LTUSD tennis policy cheats taxpayers

By Kathryn Reed

I'm usually a supporter of user fees even when I've already paid for "the thing that is being used" through some sort of other tax.

That is why I am not up in arms about the thought of paying for parking at Cove East or Lakeview Commons – the two areas in South Lake Tahoe I will frequent most that will have meters.

(I'm still a firm believer a flat annual or seasonal fee of some sort for all city parking areas should be available. This could be similar to what the U.S. Forest Service does with its beach parking permits.)

That is also why I don't have a problem paying \$5 for a tennis court at Zephyr Cove. I don't even pay taxes in that county, so this is a sweet deal. I could also pay a flat fee of \$70/season for unlimited access to those six courts.



Kathryn Reed has an easier time finding a public court out-of-state than in S. Lake Tahoe. Photo Copyright 2013 Carolyn E. Wright

Douglas County has a guy operating the facility. What the county takes in is put in a separate pot for repairs to the facility. And Rob Wheatley, who was awarded the bid to be concessionaire there, has to sweep the courts of pollen, make sure the nets are not sagging and gets the pine needles off the courts. That's why I don't have a problem paying \$5 – the county has funds for big-ticket items, and the tennis pro can make a living and does the day-to-day stuff.

But what has me seeing green fuzz and wanting to treat LTUSD officials and their affiliates like a line judge in a Serena Williams match is what is going on at South Tahoe High School.

This summer it's \$7 for no more than 90 minutes of playing time. The courts aren't even open until 1pm on Sundays.

Justin Clark, the guy making money off the public courts who has a handshake deal with the school district to give back some of his cash for improvements, says get a court time using the district's online service. District staff says it's not ready.

I say the whole thing is all a bunch of manure.

When I pay my twice-annual property taxes I am paying for three Lake Tahoe Unified School District bond measures. The newest one is for the \$64.5 million facilities bond. Part of that bond included the resurfacing of the six high school courts.

Those courts are closed more than they are open to the public.

I grew up playing on public courts in the Bay Area. Much of the time I was playing on the high school courts – long before I was a student there. There were no locks. And yes, some skateboarders went on the courts.

That is the refrain LTUSD Superintendent Jim Tarwater chants on a regular basis as to why he doesn't want the courts open

all the time – fear of skateboarders mucking up the courts.

Those are public courts. It's time to let the public in. If there has to be a fee, make it reasonable, have a fair process so it's not just the high school tennis coach who has a chance to make money on the courts, and if he can't be there, then unlock the courts.

Or maybe it's just time to shop for bolt cutters.