

Letter: Paid parking does not encourage recreation

To the community:

Recreation has been identified as the “new” vision for South Lake Tahoe.

Recreation in Tahoe is not a new idea. For as long as I can remember our marketing slogan was: Tahoe – America’s All Year Playground.

That was until the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority wonks decided to brand South Lake Tahoe “Tahoe South” and put up cartoon drawings on billboards in the Bay Area that invite visitors to “Cross Over to the Wild Side”.

We’d probably be well advised to get back to basics.

For a community that is defining its economic future as recreation, a parking program that clearly deters access to the lake seems contrary to our stated mission.

Putting \$2 per hour parking meters at El Dorado Beach, Venice Drive and in front of the privately owned Lakeside Beach and calling it a user fee seems to lack vision. The beach attendance at Lakeside this summer was down by more than 50 percent. The \$55 parking tickets that overzealous parking enforcement employees were writing just added to the mass exodus. The many businesses at Lakeside Beach are reporting a substantial decline over last year’s sales. In addition, all businesses near paid parking have become the front counter for the parking complaint department.

The city made the case early on that this parking program was all about the money. The projected income for the city was \$312,900 and was identified as enough revenue to preserve two

police positions that would be lost if we didn't raise that amount. The city then proceeded to spend/borrow more than \$300,000 plus staff time to install the meters and the dozens of pay to park signs that for reasons not completely clear face into the street where they are not visible to the driver. This may begin to explain the estimated 2,000 tickets that were written this summer. The \$312,900 projected profit will not be realized; however, city management is calling the program a success. Forty percent of the more than \$300,000 investment in the kiosks sat mostly vacant as parking customers for Venice Drive and Paradise Avenue never materialized.

The city is now probably thinking that they need to find a new home for those 13 kiosks that were not performing in two locations. Moving them to the airport would allow city staff and council members to better understand the hardship that minimum wage seasonal workers faced when their free parking was replaced by the \$10 per day fee. An estimated 150 workers found themselves scrambling to find free parking at Nevada casinos and in residential areas.

City sponsored programs that are solely designed to generate income should not harm local businesses and displace low wage workers.

On Nov. 5, the City Council will be reviewing the paid parking program. This will be their opportunity to listen to the community and decide to keep or dismantle the program or let the voters decide with a city sponsored ballot initiative. If a ballot initiative is not volunteered, it will require just 836 registered voter signatures for citizens to advance an initiative to the ballot.

Peggy Bourland-Madison, committee member Tahoe 4 Tahoe