

CTC changing the focus of its mission

By Kathryn Reed

California Tahoe Conservancy outlined Tuesday how it is transitioning from being an agency that buys land so it would not be developed to one that is collecting commodities associated with land to further development.

Patrick Wright, executive director of the state agency that is based in South Lake Tahoe, and Peter Eicher, planner with the agency, gave a presentation to the City Council on Feb. 4 about the Tahoe Livable Communities Program. Under that umbrella come the Conservancy Land Acquisition and Land Bank programs.

ANALYSIS The land bank program has existed for decades, but only recently has made headlines because of the Conservancy's selling and trading property.

"Perhaps some lands could be used for better things than open land space," Eicher told the council.

Wright said the agency is looking at its nearly 5,000 parcels in the Lake Tahoe Basin to determine if it's better to shift from acquisition mode to selling in order to better meet the state's priorities – which is greenhouse gas emissions, and the mandates of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Regional Plan – which is dense development in town centers.

Tahoe is unique in that commercial floor area (CFA), tourist accommodation units (TAU) and coverage are commodities. This means a parcel is worth more than just the land. How much of the dirt can be built on – aka coverage – is valuable. It's possible to buy a parcel and transfer coverage to another area, therefore rendering the first parcel unbuildable.

It's also possible to transfer CFA and TAU to other jurisdictions. South Lake Tahoe has a rule on the books that the council must approve such transactions.

The basin does not operate as a true free market society. It's about who has money to buy these limited commodities.

With the CTC budget drying up, it needs to find another way to generate money. Going into the Tahoe-centric commodities business is how it can stay afloat and presumably stay relevant.