

Opinion: Truckee optimistic about 2014

By Tony Lashbrook

I kicked off the New Year by cleaning up my desk and office so that I can think more clearly about the coming year. While 2013 was a banner year for the town of Truckee, 2014 has the potential to be even better.

Our economy has more than stabilized – transient occupancy tax collections are at a record pace, sales tax, while not back to pre-recession levels is growing at a healthy clip, and property tax, the stalwart of the town budget, is headed in a positive direction.

We are building significant new facilities for our community. With our partner, the Humane Society of Truckee Tahoe, we just opened the new animal shelter which will serve the needs of our community for decades.

We are halfway through widening Glenshire Drive from downtown to Glenshire to enhance traffic safety and provide class II bike lanes. Responding to a community goal identified nearly 20 years ago, we are also completing the Truckee River Legacy Trail from the regional park to Glenshire.

These two projects are game changers for our community as we create viable non-vehicular connections between Downtown and the Glenshire neighborhood. Both of these projects will be completed next fall.

We have come out the other end of the bureaucratic maze created in Sacramento by the elimination of redevelopment with our “bond” funds intact and looking to partner with the Brickelltown property owners and businesses to dramatically improve the Donner Pass Road streetscape with sidewalks,

plazas, enhanced parking, landscaping and pedestrian lighting. The prototypes for this project are the recently completed streetscape improvements on Bridge Street and at the Depot. The completion of these improvements will bolster downtown Truckee's status as the preeminent visitor destination in the region while improving mobility and functionality for us locals.

This strategy is already bearing fruit as exciting new businesses are opening downtown and vacancies are at the lowest level in several years.

In concert with this effort, based upon leadership provided by the Town Council, we are launching unprecedented programs to push our economic recovery through partnership investments to incentivize job creation, revitalize the Truckee River corridor and spur private investment. These tools provide an ability to strategically support community improvements and private investment in areas that the community has prioritized.

The portion of our economy traditionally supported by growth and development has been effectively shut down during the recession. There are some positive signs of life stirring. The Truckee Building Division has reviewed plans for 112 dwelling units in 2013. Although significantly less than the boom years, housing construction at this level would help improve the health of our economy and be sustainable for a number of years, assuming market support. Construction of new commercial buildings has been limited to a few owner occupied projects like Dickson Real Estate and the Kelly Brothers Painting, which is not surprising considering the vacancies that have cropped up through the recession. Larger projects like the Truckee Railyard have their land use planning in place and are seeking the right economic time to begin construction.

While others, like Planned Community – 1 (Coldstream), Planned Community – 3 (Joerger Ranch), Canyon Springs and Pollard

Station continue to work through the environmental and entitlement process. The town will continue to work hard in a transparent manner to ensure that these projects are fully vetted, comply with Truckee's adopted policies and standards and if built, that they actually make our community better, not just bigger.

I am excited and optimistic as the town moves into its 21st year as a municipal government. To improve service and efficiencies the town continues to fine-tune our organizational structure. Animal services and parking are now part of the police department, which consolidates our field services to maximize our outreach and enforcement efforts.

In response to strong community sentiment, the Town Council has adopted a single use plastic bag ban that will become effective in June and has placed a measure on the June ballot so Truckee voters can consider a stable funding source for trail construction and maintenance.

There will be ample opportunities for community engagement in 2014 as we move forward with an update to the Trails and Bikeways Master Plan, consider a trails funding mechanism, design the details of the Brickelltown Streetscape, update the Housing Element of the General Plan, implement economic development programs and review development proposals. I urge you to get engaged and be a part of making Truckee a better place.

Tony Lashbrook is Truckee's town manager.