

Letter: Barton Ranch Complex important to Tahoe

To the community,

Regarding the Barton Ranch Complex article, published April 9: The Lake Tahoe Historical Society (LTHS) appreciates and thanks *Lake Tahoe News (LTN)* for bringing this story to the attention of the community. If not for the *LTN* story, this issue would have continued to rest on the back pages of another local newspaper. Our concern is that there has not been adequate time for the community to be aware of the situation, become informed of the circumstances, and have sufficient time to craft informed responses to the draft Negative Declaration the property owners prepared and submitted to the city.

As I was quoted in the article, the issue is whether the ranch will be given a fair opportunity to survive. The society recognizes the property owners' rights and agrees with a 2011 city staff report regarding the Barton Ranch Complex (BRC) that stated, "Plans for this historic ranch should be economically viable to the property owner."

The city staff report describes the historical importance of the ranch and cites various regulatory rules to be considered with regard to projects on the ranch. The report goes on to say, "Demolition of the structures associated with the Barton Ranch Complex requires review and approval of the TRPA Governing Board."

The TRPA Regional Plan and Code of Ordinances includes detailed language that describe its responsibilities to historic resources and the TRPA reviews required for the issuance of permits affecting those resources. Until the *LTN* article was published there has been no information in the

press regarding TRPA involvement in the BRC permitting and/or the draft Negative Declaration process. At what point does the TRPA become involved in BRC permitting?

The TRPA issued a permit to the property owners in 2010 to demolish two historically insignificant buildings at the rear of the ranch. In that permit, TRPA instructed the owners, "Due to its designation as historic resource, no additions, modifications or removal of any other structures located in the Barton Ranch Complex is allowed."

It seems to us the TRPA needs to be involved in the current process.

At last year's tourism summit, travel to historic resources was featured as a growing interest of visitors. Developing this property as a cultural resource for the community and its visitors would certainly provide a wholesome family attraction. A history center would provide a shoulder season draw for visitors looking to enjoy Tahoe's beautiful and less crowded fall season. Perhaps the California Tahoe Conservancy (CTC) has surplus real estate it could offer the owners in trade for the ranch. The ranch property could be combined with the adjacent CTC acreage. The CTC acreage is currently proposed to become part of a greenbelt that when combined with the BRC could become a community park.

It has been asked why the LTHS waited until the last moment to get involved. The society first became aware of the owners' intention to demolish the ranch in early December 2013 and attempted to meet with the property owners to discuss options and visit the property. The property owners received our inquiry, but declined to meet with the LTHS. The property owners have not made any recent attempts to reach out to the LTHS on this matter.

The LTHS would like to request more time and opportunities for increased community involvement to determine the future the

ranch. The society plans to prepare a response to the draft Negative Declaration to request more time to explore options. The ranch has languished in its current condition for several years; a few more months will not make a difference

The LTHS is at a great disadvantage in this situation. The LTHS has been told by the TRPA that the society is not recognized by the agency as a nominator of resources for the agency's historic resource register. The LTHS believes community support and involvement are necessary to preserve the Barton Ranch.

The society is a nonprofit organization. It relies solely on membership dues, donations, and fundraisers for financial support. The society receives no financial support from the city, county, state, or federal governments. The society is an independent entity and not a part of the larger El Dorado County Historical Society. The business of the society and activities at the museum are performed by a very small group of dedicated and active volunteers.

There are sources of funding available to historical societies through larger organizations and grants, however, finding, writing, and supporting gifts and grants can be time-consuming, complicated, and in some cases it takes money to obtain money.

If you are interested in preserving the history of Lake Tahoe, especially the history of the south end of the lake, including Meyers, please consider becoming a member of the Historical Society, and if you're able, become an active volunteer.

Sincerely,

**Lee Vestal, chair, Historic Sites Committee and board member
Lake Tahoe Historical Society**