

Public gets glimpse of S. Tahoe recreation plan

By Jessie Marchesseau

About 30 people gathered at the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Center on Sept. 25 for a public open house to review the recently released draft of South Lake Tahoe's first Parks, Trails and Recreation Master Plan.

The plan, which has been in the works for more than a year, is collaboration between El Dorado County and South Lake Tahoe. During this time coordinators have gathered more than 1,200 surveys and questionnaires from residents indicating what they believe should be the community's park and recreation priorities.

The draft is available to view on the city's website, but this was the first public presentation of it.



Consultant Cindy Mendoza on Sept. 25 presents the recreation plan highlights. Photo/Jessie Marchesseau

At a long table on one side of the gymnasium sat four of the six core project team members: Norma Santiago, Angela Swanson, Vickie Sanders and Lauren Thomaselli, and five of the 11

master plan advisory committee members: Andrew Strain, Steve Yonker, Scott Valentine, Ty Polastri and Garrett Villanueva.

Thomaselli, Swanson, Strain, Polastri and Santiago each took a few minutes to speak to attendees about the plan, the process and their personal visions before handing the podium over to Cindy Mendoza, a project manager with planning and design firm MIG.

Mendoza has been helping the committee and team members develop the overall plan. She broke down some of the survey data for attendees revealing, for example, how 94 percent of residents agreed that trails, pathways and mobility were the most important areas needing improvement. One aspect she found surprising, however, was that people indicated they wanted these bike trails and paths not so much for recreation purposes, but for getting where they needed to go such as work and the grocery store.

Mendoza, in conjunction with the project team and advisory committee took these survey results and combined them with economic data, environmental concerns and recreation opportunities to create this master plan vision statement:

We envision an accessible, interconnected, and sustainable system of diverse, year-round recreation opportunities for residents and visitors. Our world-class parks, facilities, trails, and programs inspire and engage recreation enthusiasts, shape our community, connect us to our natural environment and support our shared future in the South Shore.

The master plan breaks down projects into three main categories: quick wins, short-term projects, and long-term initiatives. Long-term initiatives are the lowest on the priority list and/or the larger, more time-consuming projects; these have a six- to 10-year time line. Short-term projects will have a two- to five-year timeframe, and quick wins are

projects that can be done within the next year, offering instant gratification and a feeling of getting the ball rolling.

“We do feel like quick wins are demonstrating action,” Thomaselli said.

Some of these projects which can already be seen around town are the improvements to the Al Tahoe sports fields which were completed this summer and the extensive resurfacing of city bike trails. Dirt is also piling up at the Bijou bike park which will undergo construction next spring.

Listed as short-term priorities are a number of projects including restoration of Regan Beach, improvements to Bijou Golf Course and implementing water efficiency programs.

Making the long-term list is the renovation of the recreation and swim complex, an outdoor amphitheater or events venue, and a new park for county residents among other things.

Even though the plan’s vision statement calls for “year-round recreation opportunities,” any mention of winter activities or improvements was noticeably missing from the evening’s presentation. When asked about this oversight, Polastri said the city is going to try plowing the bike paths this winter. Beyond that, Mendoza said the focus would be more on providing people with indoor activities during the winter such as using the recreation and swim complex.

During open discussion, attendees brought up several other seemingly overlooked recreation concerns such as the Bijou skate park, fishing opportunities, rock climbing access, softball fields and sledding hills. Mendoza explained that most of these items did not show up as priorities in the public surveys, but encouraged participants to submit their concerns on questionnaire sheets available at the door.

The planners are adamant that the South Lake Tahoe of the past

which had a tendency to do a lot of planning but never carry through on those plans is no more.

“We are great at planning,” Santiago said, “but now we have a group of committed people that are good at implementation.”

The projects already under way or completed appear to be a step in the right direction. However, financial funding for most of the short- and long-term projects is still unaccounted for, though Thomaselli said she is confident if the plans are in place, the funding will come through.

The public has until Oct. 10 to submit comments and opinions on the master plan draft. The plan is online.