

Lake Valley fire regrouping after crushing vote



Proper defensible space spared this house in the Angora burn area. Photo/Lake Valley Fire

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Valley Fire Protection District's desire to tax property owners for fire prevention went up in flames Nov. 4.

Voters overwhelming said no. Nearly twice as many people voted no (66.48 percent, 1,323 votes) compared to those who said yes (33.52 percent, 667 votes.)

"Basically people don't want a tax increase," Dave Huber, chair of Lake Valley's board of directors, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We are going to regroup and see where we go from here."

The next board meeting is Nov. 13.

Measure H would have replaced Measure M with a \$120 fee tied to the consumer price index. Projections were that it would bring in \$1 million a year. It would not sunset.

Measure M, which has existed since 1986, remains in effect.

Property owners pay \$20 year, it is not tied to the CPI, and it has no expiration date. The \$150,000 raised each year goes to the general fund.

While the bulk of Measure H would have gone to fuels reduction projects, allocations also called for upgrades to facilities and equipment.

“The district still has a difficult future ahead of it financially,” fire Lt. Martin Goldberg told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He believes the measure didn’t pass because of the CPI, no expiration date and people paying the CalFire tax that they see no benefit from.

Goldberg believes residents care about wildland fire prevention, but they don’t want to pay for it.

Private property owners are not doing their part to be fire safe, he said.

“You are only as safe as your closest neighbor. If there is fuel to burn on their property, then yours is likely to catch fire as well,” Goldberg said.

But residents have said they don’t want to pay for their neighbors’, that it should be that person’s burden and should not be shared.

California has defensible space laws on the books that allow local fire departments to take punitive action against property owners who aren’t in compliance. Until now, Lake Valley has gone the passive route – namely through education. It would be up to the board if fines were to ever be issued.

Also, likely to go by the wayside is the chipping program. People could limb trees and take out small ones, then have the matter chipped. That could then be used as mulch.

The fire district is applying for a grant from CalFire that

could extend the chipping program another year. The \$10 million the state is offering is from the fee that has been collected. Lake Valley is in the running for \$25,000.