

S. Tahoe officials strategize about the future

By Kathryn Reed

Recreation is going to be the economic driver for South Lake Tahoe. One way to do this is to stop letting county and state lines be a roadblock. Another is to invest in facilities so they become moneymakers that could provide dollars for other city needs.

But more opportunities besides or in addition to being a recreation mecca are possible based on the ideas that were elicited Feb. 21.

Councilmembers, department heads and other key staff spent 3½ hours Saturday talking about what the city could be. Barely touched on was how to turn the ideas into reality, but that will be flushed out at another meeting as well as when the midyear budget review is presented in April.

“Until we know who we are, we won’t know why we are doing it,” City Manager Nancy Kerry said. “There is no shared agreement of who we are.”

But she added, “One South Shore is starting to take hold.” This is the philosophy of realizing what happens throughout the South Shore impacts everyone and that working together instead of against each other is better for everyone.

And while the city is accountable to the residents within its boundaries, the decisions it makes have impacts beyond its borders.

Ted Gaebler, author of “Reinventing Government” and a retired city manager who spent 50 years in local government, facilitated the meeting at Lakeland Village. He asked them all

to express their vision for the city – regardless of money, current policy, how long it would take to achieve or the realistic ability to achieve the goal.

The purpose was to stimulate these city leaders and to get them thinking beyond the norms, beyond what is expected and beyond the ordinary.



South Lake Tahoe city staff explain to the council the projects that are in the works. Photo/LTN

Here are some of the ideas:

- Erase the state line. Or go even further and create an entity whereby the Lake Tahoe Basin governs itself – almost like it is a state unto itself, or have the area be one bi-state county.
- Turn the casinos into condos.
- Have Caltrans turn Highway 50 over to the city so it becomes a city street, which would give the city more opportunities.
- Redevelop Barton Ranch – possibly convert it into a farm

for locally sourced food.

- Light rail on Highway 50.
- Tear down dilapidated hotels in town and build quality affordable housing.
- Build a quality recreation center.
- Create an events center for concerts.
- Public art.
- More special events.
- Focus on quality of life.
- Ensure the community is engaged in order to make changes.
- A safe community – in terms of lighted walkways, low crime, and fire safe.
- Build a children's or discovery museum.
- Better transportation.
- Better connectivity with the trail system.
- Tear down one-third of the hotels. ("We need families here instead of tourists.")
- Purchase private beaches and turn them into public beaches.
- Remove private residences from the shoreline and create more public access via commercial enterprises like lakeside dining.
- Get rid of Campground by the Lake and make it city offices.
- Revise commercial floor area so it is only needed for one

level; this would create more development opportunities.

- Turn the airport into a heliport and then have special events there.
- Take over South Tahoe Public Utility District; this would reduce redundancies and allow for improvements to be made faster.
- Collaborate with private entities and public agencies.

Gaebler reminded the City Council that their responsibility is to the steer the boat, not to actually be doing the rowing.

“We can’t do any of the stuff we would like to do without new revenue,” Councilman Austin Sass said.

He wanted his colleagues to embrace getting a tax hike of some kind on the ballot in November 2016. But they collectively said “slow down” so there would be time to evaluate what exactly any new income would be spent on. Then there will be the discussion about how the money would be raised.

The electeds do seem to agree money should be spent on recreation – but that is a broad topic. The idea, though, is to improve recreation – which will bring money to city coffers – and use revenue from those recreation endeavors to fund road improvements and other needs within the city.