

Cyclists pumped about Bijou Bike Park

By Kathryn Reed

Cycling enthusiasts aren't waiting for South Lake Tahoe officials to figure out how and when to put in a bike park at Bijou Community Park. The mound of dirt sitting there is already a feature of sorts. But that's not exactly why it's there.

The 400-cubic-yards of dirt came from the Harrison Avenue project. It will be moved – possibly this summer – to another location in the park to construct what will be a 5-acre bike park with two pump tracks and a BMX track in the center.

Bike parks attract all ages and ability levels. For those new to the sport or not quite ready for some of the gnarly trails the banks and features at the park are a way to speed up the learning process. They are also where cyclists might end their day after riding the trails.

These types of parks are growing in popularity and help lure tourists to an area. Mountain bikers, like other athletes, are willing to spend good money on their sport.

Outdoor Foundation did a study in 2010 that all cyclists annually contribute \$133 billion to the U.S. economy. Of that, \$46.9 billion is spent on expenses related to cycling trips.



Bijou Bike Park may be built this year. Rendering/Design Workshop

It is possible South Lake Tahoe will have such a park by the end of the summer.

The bike park has been talked about since 2011. The nonprofit Bijou Bike Park Association was formed to be the main force behind the project. The group has come up with a design, more than half of the needed money to build it, a professional builder and a ton of enthusiasm.

Twenty-two people spoke at the March 3 City Council meeting – all in favor of the park. About that many also wrote letters of support.

However, a couple hiccups have arisen that are preventing the park from being a done deal.

Originally, BBPA and the city were going to enter a lease agreement. Because of the cost of liability insurance and

needing to acquire coverage per Tahoe Regional Planning Agency rules, it is now going to be a city run bike park with BBPA providing assistance with construction and maintenance.

TRPA claims the city is putting in 32,000 square feet of new coverage – even though it's dirt. Coverage regulations are something the bi-state regulatory agency came up with as a way to deal with erosion issues. The city could borrow from its bank of coverage or come up with the more than \$60,000 for the mitigation fee – which is paid to TRPA. Staff is leaning toward the latter so the banked coverage could be used for a commercial project such as renovating the recreation center.

It's also possible the coverage the school district is using for the current BMX track could be transferred to the city.

Taking out a permit will trigger the immediate requirement to bring the restrooms up to the Americans with Disability Act specifications. While this was on the city's to-do list, it wasn't slated for this construction season. That cost is estimated at \$25,000.

At Tuesday's meeting the city was told in addition to the \$100,000 already pledged to the bike park, another \$86,241 is needed in cash and about \$35,000 in in-kind services that would include staff time for planning and moving the dirt. The total project is estimated to be \$511,000.

Some trees will need to be removed. Irrigation will be put in to dampen the course so dust is not an issue. An electrical conduit will be established so in the future lights could be installed. Bleachers are possible down the road. (The disc golf area will not be affected.)

BBPA has been talking with Lake Tahoe Community College to possibly use its parking lots when events are staged at the park.

The BMX track pays LTUSD 20 percent of gross revenues, so some

sort of contract would be devised between that group and the city. Last year the BMX group hosted an event that brought 300 competitors to the area. This year a different event is expected to draw 500 to 600 riders.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District wants to use its land where the current BMX track is for a ball field at South Tahoe Middle School so that facility needs to move. The new BMX track would be 900 feet; 100 feet longer than the current one.

Still to be worked out are the legal issues regarding volunteers working on city property and liability issues for the city if someone is hurt. Garrett Villanueva, trails specialist with the U.S. Forest Service, explained to the council how the feds have an arrangement so volunteers are covered under their workers' comp insurance.

Councilmembers Austin Sass and Tom Davis (who was absent because of an illness) make up the city's recreation implementation subcommittee. They will meet next week with BBPA and city recreation commission members to iron out some details, while the city attorney works on legal ramifications.

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Notes:

- Bijou Bike Park Association has a website with information, a way for people to make donations and to get involved.