

S. Tahoe identifies 12 acres for concert venue



The clearing in the distance could be an area for a stage. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

An outdoor concert venue that isn't a parking lot. A setting that embraces the natural environment. A site that could be used year-round. A place that would have limited impact to residents.

It does exist in South Lake Tahoe.

City officials are looking at the possibility of turning 12 acres at Lake Tahoe Airport into an event center.

The Federal Aviation Administration has already given the OK to have special events there on a case-by-case basis. Through the airport master plan process the city is seeking to designate this area non-aviation. If that goes through, then

the city can do what it wants with the land without permission from the FAA.

“It’s common sense this is non-aviation,” City Manager Nancy Kerry said while walking the property with Councilwoman Wendy David.

The City Council has approved a cost benefit study to be done. Engineers will be brought out to assess the site.

Much of the property sits a few hundred feet below Highway 50, paralleling Kyburz Avenue. This means little road noise for attendees and less chance of concert sounds drifting to residences.

Plus, the density of trees will help absorb the sound.



South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry, right, gives Councilwoman Wendy David a tour March 14 of the proposed event center site.

Walking farther into the space the quieter it gets. It’s like being in the wilderness even though civilization is so close.

Kerry said people are looking for an experience beyond listening to music. This setting would be designed to provide just that.

“They don’t want to bother your environment, they want to be in your environment,” she said.

South Lake Tahoe has been looking for a site to stage music festivals ever since SnowGlobe came to town in 2011. It brings more than 10,000 people each night to what is a three-day music festival at the ball field at Lake Tahoe Community College, and millions of dollars to the local economy. But it also brings wear-and-tear to the synthetic field, and noise complaints from neighbors.

The airport parcel is larger than the area used at the college for SnowGlobe.

The idea is not to build large structures or lots of permanent seating. Limited terraced seating would be created. At most multi-day outdoor festivals everyone is standing – often dancing.

Some infrastructure is in place – like a concrete slab from when this site was a summer boys and girls camp, and sewer capacity. A segment of a paved road from the corner of Kyburz Avenue and Melba Road remains and could be the route where vendors would access the facility.

Electricity would need to be brought to the area, fencing installed, some trees removed and one storm drain would need to be put underground.



Part of the existing

trail is wide enough
for vehicles.

A future bike trail through this area is already on the books. That is the route that would likely be developed for attendees to use. It's already a distinct path that is well used by cyclists. Interpretive signs could be erected to educate the public about the forest, what being a steward of the land is about and other Tahoe-centric things.

Kerry said she envisions the entrance being at the defunct airport control tower. Parking would be at the airport, along with shuttles from other parts of town to the venue. People would then walk into the forest, a bridge going over the creek would be built and then multiple tents might be erected – like SnowGlobe – so various acts could be playing at the same time.

It's also possible this site would be used for more than music events.

Originally, this parcel was slated to be commercial development to complement airport needs. With the city deciding to forgo trying to establish this as a commercial airport again, the need for ancillary businesses is a moot point.