

SLT making it easier to access Connolly Beach



South Lake Tahoe officials want to ensure the public has access to Connolly Beach. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Three bear boxes, boulders and a beat up bike rack are what welcome the public to Connolly Beach from the parking lot. The pavement is in disrepair. Vehicle access is through the hotel maze.

A sign says no alcohol is allowed on the beach, but the owners of the Beach Retreat Hotel have set up a bar. Farther down are four hammocks with signs saying they are only for hotel guests.

This stretch of sand in the middle of South Lake Tahoe has been contentious for years. And even though the state Supreme Court has weighed in on the topic, the city and current owner – Urbana Realty Advisors – are still not on the same page.

“I feel excluded even though I know my feet treaded there as a kid,” Sue Hoy told the City Council on Tuesday. She said the beach is now “totally unwelcoming.”



Hotel owners have strung private hammocks on the public beach.

As with all beaches in California, the public has a right to access the sand below the high-water mark at any hour of the day, every day of year.

The court, though, ruled the public also has access from the high-water mark – 6,229.1 feet – to 100 feet toward the hotel. No one bothered to survey this at the time of the 1985 decision. The city recently did. That 100 feet goes into the buildings.

This is why the city wants all of the beach to be accessible to the public. The courts said so. However, access to the 100

feet from the high-water mark is only available June 1-Sept. 30, sunrise to sunset.

The South Lake Tahoe City Council on May 19 was updated on where things stand regarding what is better known as Timber Cove Beach and gave staff direction on how to proceed.

No one from the property attended the meeting.

“They can’t ask the public to leave unless they are disruptive,” City Manager Nancy Kerry explained.



The gate at Bal Bijou is coming down by the end of May.

The gate at Bal Bijou will be removed before June 1 so the public has access to the beach parking area without having to drive through the hotel property. A tree needs to come down and paving in some areas will occur.

Eighteen of the parking spots are public.

Signage will be placed on the beach to help explain ownership and usage issues.

The California Tahoe Conservancy is also interested in

ensuring the public has access. It owns a tiny lot to the west of the Beach Retreat property. With the lake so low, it's possible to walk from the CTC lot to Connolly Beach without any obstruction.

Chris Mertens, an environmental planner with CTC, said his agency wants to provide another access point to Connolly Beach. To make that happen talks need to be initiated with the hotel owners as well as Tahoe Shores, which is on the other side of the CTC lot.

Another issue the city is working on is how to actually spell Connolly.

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In other action:

- The council accepted a \$98,000 donation from Lisa Maloff for the purchase of a K-9. The money will also pay for the four-legged officer's training and equipment.
- Pump Trax was awarded the \$60,550 bid to design and oversee the construction of the Bijou Bike Park.