

Runnels must remove abandoned cars at Y

By Kathryn Reed

A judge on Thursday put the brakes on abandoned cars being able to be stored in South Lake Tahoe.

John Runnels has 30 days to get rid of the vehicles sitting on his property on the northwest corner of the Y.

Previous city managers, city attorneys and councils have wanted to rid the vehicles. Until this week, none had succeeded.



John Runnels has a court order to remove the abandoned vehicles on his property in 30 days. Photo/Ernie Claudio

In October 2006 Runnels went before a city zoning administrator for a nuisance hearing after police officers cited him. Runnels prevailed.

Runnels was issued a dealers' license in 1979 by the DMV, the

same year the city's Planning Commission approved a special use permit allowing him to store unregistered vehicles at the Emerald Bay Road business. Two of the conditions of the city permit were that Runnels had to maintain valid certification from the state to sell and repair vehicles. They both expired. That gave the city the power to revoke the special use permit.

Talks have been going on for about a year, with both sides ultimately putting the matter in a judge's hands. On Aug. 6 after a four-hour hearing, El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Daniel Proud ruled in the city's favor, determining the vehicles are abandoned, which violates city ordinances.

"We did a title search on each vehicle. We had to prove they were abandoned," City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We did a history search on each vehicle. All of this history and research determined they are abandoned and not for sale."

Runnels could still operate a store on site. He was not available for comment. He owns the corner lot as well as the parcel behind it.