

Truckee being proactive about climate change



Truckee is taking steps to get a handle on climate change. Photo/LTN file

By Linda Fine Conaboy

TRUCKEE –Truckee Town Manager Tony Lashbrook last week said it is imperative the town starts acting on climate change.

This comes two months after he said that because of its location Truckee is not required to do climate action planning, but that big monetary incentives make it desirable to do so.

Lashbrook and others representing invested entities presented a second workshop, this time to Truckee Donner Chamber of Commerce members and guests, on Sept. 15. As this issue has heated up in the last two months with climate change being a factor in the drought and wildfires, so has the town's knowledge base.

The consensus was to get a handle on climate change now. Judging by questions and comments, this audience has gone beyond questioning the reality of climate change, and is

anxious to move forward.

People at the meeting not only endorse things like charging stations for electric cars (eight are planned), one man said he's ready to purchase a hydrogen-powered vehicle. It just so happens that one of the two Shell gas stations in town is in the process of installing a hydrogen fuel pump. Hydrogen emits only water from a vehicle's tailpipe, not carbon dioxide and other nasty elements.

This Nevada County town is a part of the state's "fishhook," Steve Frisch, president of Sierra Business Council explained. As such, it is not required to have formal plans to address a changing climate. These counties are more rural with not enough population to become part of a metropolitan planning organization, and, consequently, not able to apply for some of the grants from the pots of funding available through California's MPO program. Because Truckee is outside the Tahoe basin it cannot be part of the Tahoe MPO established through the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

However, according to Greg Jones, vice president of the Sierra Business Council, and Frisch, this pot, funded by federal cap and trade regulation, is large, more than \$2 billion in 2013-15, and guaranteed to grow in coming years. And it's worth going after Truckee's share.

To do this, Truckee has developed a process to address climate action planning, focusing on those activities that can be achieved in a cost effective manner. This includes, among other things, a greenhouse gas inventory, and maybe even more important, public engagement, Jones said.

In fact, in his presentation, public engagement is mentioned many times, along with conducting a greenhouse gas inventory, establishing attainable greenhouse gas reduction targets, and creating a process to implement reductions and monitoring and track results.

He added that some of the benefits of a climate action plan include: saving taxpayers money, enhancing the economy, and job creation.

Since time was short and there were several speakers, each presented a pared-down version of what their organizations are doing in the pursuit of decreasing greenhouse gas emissions.

Steve Poncelet, public information officer and conservation manager at Truckee Donner Public Utilities District, said Truckee Donner PUD hasn't had a rate increase in years, while generating more than \$800,000 annually as a cap and trade seller.

He also said TDPUD's water conservation programs are strong and that according to data, the use of charging stations is up. The question now is where to locate them. According to Poncelet, it costs \$1 per hour to charge a vehicle.

Greg Sorenson, the president of Liberty Utilities, took a turn at the podium explaining his company has 49,000 customers locally who make use of Liberty's clean and renewable power generation, for the time being purchased from NV Energy. He added that 23 percent of the company's energy comes from renewable sources and that by 2016 that number will increase to 25 percent.

Liberty energy efficiency programs include: in-home energy audits, free CFL bulbs, refrigerator and freezer recycling and incentives for public schools to save energy. Additionally, the residential carbon credit program allows customers to generate their own power – net metering.

In 2016, pending approval, the company will offer a solar incentive program available to residential and commercial customers and will establish a **50-megawatt power generating plant** in Luning, Nev.

"People are generating their own energy," Sorenson said. "But

they're not on the grid. The argument is, when a customer needs the grid, how do they pay?"

To his way of thinking, there is no good solution to this problem yet. "How much contribution from solar customers should there be?" he asked. "There are still lots of questions to be answered. For example, what happens on cloudy days? How do you plan for intermittent outages? It's coming down to storage and distribution."

The path to sustainable energy and corralling greenhouse emissions remains somewhat bumpy, but Truckee is taking the challenge.

"We're committed to moving forward with our greenhouse gas inventory," Lashbrook said. "Once we scope that, we're looking for money, several hundred thousand dollars. Even though we don't have a plan yet, there's a lot of good, effective work being done."