

Truckee lends hand to South Shore on passing tax initiative dedicated for recreation

By Kathryn Reed

Commitment, dedication, a cadre of volunteers, a clear and convincing message, and money are some of the factors that can make a difference in a tax initiative getting the requisite number of voters to say yes.

Three key figures in Truckee's 2014 passage of a quarter-cent sales tax hike spoke to a group of South Shore recreation advocates on Wednesday. Measure R is projected to generate \$1.2 million a year, with all of that money dedicated to trails.

With South Lake Tahoe contemplating asking voters in November to raise taxes, the Feb. 17 discussion was an opportunity for those outside the political spectrum to learn what it takes to put on a successful campaign.

Tony Lashbrook, town manager, spoke volumes about the need to have a partner group to work with. In this case it was the nonprofit Truckee Trails Foundation headed by Allison Pedley. Then it took someone to lead the campaign committee who could be trusted and get the job done. That fell to Paco Lindsay, who has lived in Truckee for decades and owns a bike shop there.

The nonprofit was formed out of the town doing a recreation plan. It is an eight-member volunteer board, with a part time executive director, and more than 1,000 members.



Tony Lashbrook, from left, Paco Lindsay and Allison Pedley talk Feb. 17 about how Truckee passed a tax for trails. Photo/LTN

The three outlined how it is necessary to get as many people engaged as possible – even the opposition. It means listening as well as educating. It included convincing business owners that they would not lose sales with higher taxes because a better trail network would mean more people coming to town. Ultimately the measure passed with 76 percent of the votes.

Advertising was targeted. Signs, mailers and other material were of a high caliber. On election day people were monitoring precincts and calls were made to those who had yet to vote.

“Communication is what it’s about,” Lindsay said.

A consultant was hired to help provide professional assistance. The campaign cost about \$35,000. That money came from small and large donations from community members.

While Truckee has no certain way to track the return on investment with the increase of trails in the area, Lashbrook said the town has broken hotel tax records for the last four years and this was during three horribly dry winters.

With it costing about \$1 million per mile of paved trail, the increase to the network will be a slow, methodical process. But it was pointed out that the income from the measure could be used as leverage to get grants.

A sizeable chunk of the cash is being used to plow some of the paths, which the three said they don't ever see changing based on the use of the trails in winter.

The trio admitted the whole idea of paving trails and not just leaving them dirt has been controversial. The initial survey regarding the tax hike didn't have a majority saying yes. While it was work to be successful, they were encouraging to the South Shore contingent that the end result justified the effort that went into it.

As for South Lake Tahoe, the Recreation Commission has created a subcommittee what will work with the City Council's subcommittee to look at how a 2 percent increase in the transient occupancy tax that might generate \$2 million a year could be spent – a new rec facility? sheet of ice? trails? something else?