

Year-round hockey academy moving to Meyers

By Kathryn Reed

Meyers is about to be home to the Tahoe Hockey Academy.

The year-round facility for boys and girls in middle or high school is expected to break ground this summer. The building permits from El Dorado County are in hand. The project is on the consent agenda of the May 25 Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board meeting.

“We are looking at initiation on the upper dorm as early as June and the first academic year starting in August,” Mike Dill of Aspen Environmental Services told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Dill works for Tahoe Hockey Academy, the group that is looking to move onto the property to create a year-round sports school.

The existing residence would become a dorm, with another 7,000 square feet added to it. A second two-story building will be 13,193 square feet, which will be part dorm, dining hall, kitchen and exercise room. In all, about 90 youths would live there, along with eight residence assistants.

A tennis court, which has been previously approved and graded, but not built, would be converted into a mini ice rink in the winter for 3-on-3 practices. The ice rink in South Lake Tahoe is where they would have full team practices, as well as games.

“The academy will follow the school year – August to May. Then the facility will operate summer camps for groups of 20 to 25 kids,” Dill said. “Basically it’s a prep school and prep academy to get them academically ready for college and

physically ready to play Division 1 hockey.”

The 3,800-square-foot residence was erected years ago. This is a legally existing, non-conforming use. Converting the use to a recreation facility will bring it into compliance.

Some Meyers residents are starting to question why this project seems to be getting approved without the usual scrutiny.

“The previous approvals are part of the parcel’s history. It doesn’t mean we don’t do the same level of review,” Paul Nielsen, planner with TRPA, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It’s on the consent calendar because until recently there was no known concerns about the project.”

When the notice about the project went out to neighbors this month letters started coming in to TRPA. Noise and water supply are two of the main concerns so far.

In 2006, the 16.4-acre parcel known as Echo Creek was permitted to be a recreation group facility for about 200 people. The infrastructure was put in, the lower loop road built, grading for the tennis court is done, with the basketball court already in place. In fact, 80 percent of the grading for the academy is complete, which includes tree removal.

The problem is the owners at the time – Alex Graf and Paul Gardner – could not find a user. Both men have since died and their trusts are left dealing with the parcel at the bottom of Old Meyers Grade.

In 2012, Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care seriously considered relocating there, but a deal could not be reached.

Tahoe Hockey Academy, which is run by a group of investors, is leasing the property, with an option to buy.

Noise, traffic and vehicle miles traveled have been studied.

"We will have full size buses to shuttle kids to tournaments; passenger vans to get to the rink (in South Lake Tahoe)," Dill said.

There will be 44 parking spaces for general use, and nine for employees. The thinking is because of the age of students most will not have a vehicle at the academy.

Dill does not anticipate the academy having any impact on those who walk-run Old Meyers Grade, especially because the academy will not use the street for parking. The gate will stay where it is.