

Meyers hockey academy on solid ice

TRPA board approves facility

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Hockey before education. That is ultimately what made the difference for the Tahoe Hockey Academy in Meyers to move forward.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board on June 22 voted unanimously to allow a 16.4-acre parcel at the bottom of Old Meyers Grade to be transformed into an elite hockey academy for athletes seeking to play at a Division 1 university or beyond.

“We are going to help a lot of kids achieve their goals. That is the most important thing,” Jami James, founder and vice president of Tahoe Hockey Academy, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting.

As a kid James came to Tahoe to go to different camps. He said he played hockey and baseball at the professional level. The Berkeley native said he loves Tahoe and wants to give back, to help youngsters, to essentially repay the people who helped him when he was an at-risk kid.

While education is a large component of what will go on at the academy, hockey is the reason youth ages 13 to 20 will attend. All classes will be online. No instructors will be at the facility.

Opponents argued this is a school, while proponents said the

California Department of Education does not define this type of facility as being a school. The parcel is zoned for a group facility. If this were deemed to primarily be a school, it would not be an allowed use per zoning regulations.

At build-out, which is probably going to take a few years, eight adults will be employed, with 92 players attending. Dorms will be built, with construction expected to start this summer. James told *LTN* the school will start this fall, but players are likely to be housed elsewhere until construction is finished.

The academy will follow the academic year, with summer being reserved for camps – including this summer.

The project generated controversy when last month it was on the bi-state regulatory agency's consent agenda. Letters and phone calls prompted staff to table the item for one month and bring it out into the open with a public hearing. It was originally on the consent agenda because two previous projects – in 1995 and 2011 – had been approved, and the academy is an allowed use.

Land use, parking, traffic, coverage, noise and lighting were the major issues raised.

The 10 people who spoke on Wednesday were almost split between supporters and opponents.

The uproar generated change, including moving the tennis court away from the nearest neighbor. It will be frozen in the winter to have training onsite. Resident Rick Van Horn is worried any chemicals used in the coils for freezing purposes could leak. He asked for the soil and groundwater to be tested.

No outside lights will be used to enable play or training after dark.

No student is expected to have a vehicle. Vans will transport the players to the ice rink in South Lake Tahoe.

Earmarked by the academy is \$150,000 in upgrades for that facility.

All of the board members who spoke were complimentary of the academy, saying this is good for the region, will benefit the economy and that one day the South Shore may be home to Olympic hockey players just as it is for skiers and snowboarders.