

SLT creating welcome center at airport

By Kathryn Reed

What does the lobby of Lake Tahoe Airport, aka South Lake Tahoe City Hall, say?

The answer, according to Councilmembers Wendy David, Austin Sass and Hal Cole, is that it's shabby and there is so much potential. They voted Tuesday to spend hundreds of thousands dollars to renovate the space and transform it into a welcoming venue for locals and tourists. After all, the main offices for the city of South Lake Tahoe are expected to be located there for the unforeseeable future.

Councilmembers Tom Davis and JoAnn Conner are all for spending the money to upgrade the infrastructure and make it comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. However, neither wants to do more than the minimum.

The council on a 3-2 vote agreed to pay more than \$600,000 to renovate the facility, with the goal of having it completed by the end of September. About half of the money is for needed upgrades like plumbing, electrical, heating and air conditioning. The other half is "extras" to create a visitors center of sorts, as well as upgrade council chambers and the lower lobby area.

It is not possible to divide the work into "necessary" and "extra" because that would most likely require going out to bid again. Plus, some of the improvements are intertwined.

Much of the money to do so comes from Barton Health having bought coverage from the city. The banked asset comes from the airport so the money has to be spent at that facility.



Lake Tahoe Airport's lobby doubles as the entrance to South Lake Tahoe's city offices. Photo/LTN file

Signs will be placed on Highway 50 directing people to the visitors center.

The city has already talked to Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority about helping with what should be included in the display. It won't be a staffed facility. It will, though, be interactive. For those wanting to talk to someone, there is the receptionist for the city and phone lines will go directly to the LTVA.

With the restaurant at the airport being overhauled, it may also become more of a destination for locals. The new owners have already said the stack of brochures for tourist-type business will no longer be in there.

One of the major sticking points for Davis and Conner is the gas fireplace that will be installed. Plus, they don't think this is the best use of city dollars. Conner also advocated for moving City Hall someplace closer to the heart of town so it would be easier to get to. However, she didn't have any ideas for where the millions of dollars to do this would come from.

Davis has never supported the renovation idea.

Cole believes the upgrades will be beneficial no matter what the use of the facility is in the future, and that they are

long overdue. Plus, he believes the design will be a showcase of alpine architecture with wood and rock that the electeds say they want others to incorporate when doing any future construction.

At the June 21 meeting the contract was awarded to DML Construction. The firm plans to use six local subcontractors.

In other action:

- The council unanimously agreed to make the next franchise agreement with Southwest Gas be 10 years. And the electeds want all future franchise agreements to be 10 years. Some have been for 30 or 50 years.

- The council at a future meeting will be discussing the rental car surcharge imposed by Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. This was implemented when the airport had commercial air service.