

STR to offer interest free bear box loans

By Kathryn Reed

Homeowners in South Tahoe Refuse's service area at Lake Tahoe are expected to soon have the opportunity to take out an interest free loan for bear boxes.

The South Lake Tahoe Waste Management Authority board this month approved the concept. Actual language for the program is expected to be solidified at the board's November meeting.

The JPA will front \$70,000 for the program that will be administered by the garbage company. Homeowners – whether they live in Tahoe full time or not – will be eligible to apply for a loan up to \$1,200. It must be paid back in five years.

There was some discussion whether the program should be open to second homeowners.

“The point is to eliminate bears getting into garbage. Anything this agency can do to further that on the South Shore is being proactive,” Nancy McDermid said. She is Douglas County's rep to the JPA. (El Dorado County and South Lake Tahoe are the other partners in the JPA.)

The South Shore ordinance is in large part following what Tahoe Truckee Sanitation District is doing in Placer County.

“If the homeowner doesn't make a payment even though it is interest free, then there is 10 percent interest and a late fee,” explained Tom Bruen, attorney for the JPA. “It's not a smart thing for the homeowner to skip out on the fee.”

It would also be possible to put a lien against the house so the refuse company could recoup its costs at the time of sale.

Homeowners who are currently delinquent with trash bills would not be eligible for the program.

There will be a non-refundable \$50 application fee. If a homeowner goes forward with the bear box loan, that \$50 will be applied to the \$150 administrative fee. That \$150 pays for STR to process the paperwork, have a site visit and work with the contractor as to where the box will go. Of that, \$100 can be rolled into the overall loan.

It will be possible for people to order less or more expensive boxes, but the loan will not exceed \$1,200.

STR at the meeting asked for the stipulation that boxes not be farther than 10 feet from the street. This has to do with crews having to carry the cans to the truck. The farther away the cans are the greater chance for injury.

Another regulation STR wants to ensure is that the cans in the boxes are 32 gallons.

The exception to this rule will be in the Tahoe Keys. The homeowners' association has architectural guidelines for residents stating bear boxes are not allowed. Those rules are being rewritten with input from STR and the city of South Lake Tahoe. Proposals include having the boxes closer to the house and larger totes – 64 gallons. This route would be accessed by a special truck.

A sticking point on finalizing the Tahoe Keys pilot program is the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. Coverage is a bugaboo for the bi-state regulatory agency.

STR officials at the meeting pointed out that as more bear boxes are installed it will take longer to service the routes. This is because there is no way for crews to know if the box has garbage in it so they have to check each one.

When *Lake Tahoe News* asked STR President Jeff Tillman if a

flag like what is used on mailboxes could be employed on bear boxes he said no because opponents to this idea have safety concerns. They believe an indicator saying there is no trash is the equivalent to telling would-be burglars there is no one home.