

No shortage of housing woes on North Shore, Truckee; solutions harder to identify



Placer County electeds hope an action plan comes out of the housing report. Photo/Linda Fine Conaboy

By Linda Fine Conaboy

KINGS BEACH – A study commissioned by the Placer County Board of Supervisors underscored what most people already know – housing is a problem.

Results from the Tahoe Truckee Housing Needs Assessment were presented to the board on Oct. 25.

Here are some of the statistics for the North Shore and Truckee areas:

- 80 percent of housing units are single-family

homes

- 65 percent are vacant and used mostly for vacations
- Nearly half were built before 1979
- Median household income is \$67,000, but median home pricing is \$538,000 (2015 statistics)
- The maximum affordable home price for a family of four in a low-income bracket is \$235,000
- 76 percent of residents spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing (statistically, more than they can afford)
- The wait list for affordable housing is six months to 2 years
- To house the future workforce, 12,160 housing units will be needed
- Nearly 60 percent of employees commute to work
- Nearly 50 percent of residents commute outside the basin for work
- Nearly 50 percent of the region's residents sit between very low to moderate income levels.

It was in January 2015 that supervisors approved \$76,000, Placer County's share of the \$172,000 project cost, to develop a housing needs assessment in conjunction with Nevada County, Truckee and the Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation. TTCF was charged with preparing and presenting the housing needs assessment, and Bay Area Economics was hired to complete the study, prepare findings and make recommendations.

Stacy Caldwell, TTCF chief executive officer said, "This is hard stuff. We're not just talking about housing, we're

talking about people.”

She called the assessment a regional collaboration and a good opportunity to focus on next steps and solutions. Additionally, TTCF said on its website that the study represents all aspects of housing issues in the North Lake Tahoe region.

Caldwell said now that the facts have been gathered, the community is looking at how to move forward. She said there is widespread community momentum, hopefully eliminating the possibility that yet another study will be left to gather dust on a shelf in someone’s office.

“We need to move forward in a collaborative manner,” she said, stating that the Community Foundation has established a \$10,000 housing fund to get the donation ball rolling.

She suggested to the board that permits that raise housing costs considerably could be deferred. “There’s a desire for people to use their property to circumvent these barriers.”

District 5 Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery said perhaps expensive fees could be waived or deferred. “But it’s a challenge because of all the fees,” she said. “It is also complicated by TRPA and their rules.

In an **Oct. 21 Lake Tahoe News opinion piece**, Joanne Marchetta, executive director of TRPA, expressed her concerns about the same topic, saying full-time rentals are scarce and often unaffordable.

In her piece, Marchetta said, “Affordable workplace housing is a complex, challenging issue here at Lake Tahoe and elsewhere. We are not alone in facing these issues and there’s a renewed spirit today at Tahoe to tackle the challenge.”

Additionally, Marchetta expressed a willingness to solve workforce problems. “There is no one silver bullet to solve

these complex issues ... but by strengthening our collective will to work together on this important issue and be creative, we can make needed change happen.”

For her part, Montgomery said, “I want to get all of the districts together to determine a solution. Let’s take all of our resources to get something done. This just can’t sit on a shelf.”

“There are untapped resources,” Caldwell said. “Like HUD financing. We have baseline information now and we need to gather our resources together.”

Supervisor Kirk Uhler wondered how the town of Mammoth solved its housing problems, intimating that Lake Tahoe is not the only resort area to have reached this crisis.

Uhler also likes the idea of encouraging longer term rentals rather than seasonal. “If there is an inventory of short-term housing, what is it?” he asked. “Maybe people might want to rent their vacation homes to seasonal workers.” He proposed that older homes be rehabilitated and he likes the idea of turning larger homes into multiple housing units as well as freeing up homes that sit vacant.

Montgomery said she would like to see the Contractor’s Board and the Board of Realtors get involved in the conversation, a statement that cued representatives from both the Realtors and contractors’ boards to step forward to pledge their groups’ support.

Several other organizations and private citizens told their stories about housing and promised support.

Montgomery capped the meeting, saying, “We need to move from words to action and no longer have circular conversations. I would like to see more money for this problem. This is not unique to Placer County, it is nationwide. But we don’t want to create large pockets of low-income areas. We, as a

community, must come together to support the project—quickly—in the next few months.”