

Placer supes green light area plan, TC Lodge

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – Tahoe City is one step closer to getting its first new lodging for tourists in decades.

The Placer County Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 on Dec. 6 to approve the Tahoe Basin Area Plan and the Tahoe City Lodge.

Most of the discussion Tuesday centered on Tahoe City and the lodge in particular. This rankled some people because the area plan affects all areas of Placer County in the basin. About one-third of the lake is in the basin.

When the process started a couple years ago people voiced their concern about having the lodge project being studied under the auspices of the creation of an environment impact report for the area plan. Based on Tuesday's testimony from staff, the electeds and public, it was obvious the lodge was driving the document's approval.

Some wonder if the document would have been analyzed to a deeper level if the project that the powers that be wanted had not been part of the equation.

The vote Tuesday was consistent with what the North Tahoe Regional Advisory Council and Placer County Planning Commission said. Both of those bodies approved the area plan and lodge project in November. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board will take up the area plan and lodge on Jan. 25, which will be the last vote.

Much of the public agreed with the policymakers. About 50 people were at Tuesday's meeting at the North Tahoe Event Center, with 23 of them testifying.



An artist's rendering of the proposed Tahoe City Lodge.

Crystal Jacobsen, principal planner with the county, went over highlights of the plan and project, as well as changes since the draft and final environmental documents came out.

She acknowledged that traffic, whether its vehicle miles traveled or level of service, is dismal now. The lodge project impacts are deemed "significant and unavoidable."

"When are we going to deal with these issues?" Jennifer Quashnick with Friends of the West Shore asked.

That's a question that no governing body has been willing to answer no matter what project comes before them. Various entities keep approving development without an answer to deal with congestion affecting the immediate project on the table, let alone the bigger cumulative effect of growth in the basin and Truckee.

This in turn impacts greenhouse gas emissions.

Samir Tuma, the lodge developer, said one way he will be helping to reduce VMT is by giving bus passes to employees and providing a shower to those who bike to work. Plus, he mentioned how there is a bus stop right out front.

The lodge will include 78 condos and 40 traditional hotel rooms. The four-story structure that will front Highway 28 will have a rooftop restaurant.

Tuma said there will be an infusion of \$43.4 million into the community during construction, with \$8.6 million annually coming in via taxes, jobs and other revenue. It will be built at a LEED level, with green business practices implemented.

A representative from the League to Save Lake Tahoe said this is first time in 10 years the conservation group has backed a redevelopment project. The Tahoe City Downtown Association said this is the first project this group has supported.

A bonus to the community is that the Tahoe City Golf Course clubhouse will be rebuilt by Tuma to include a conference center on the second floor.

Supervisor Kirk Uhler was most interested in how the area plan will allow second units to help address the housing crunch in the area. He believes what is proposed is too restrictive and might not be economically feasible with the deed restriction. He said people can pay market rate, it's just that the housing stock is limited.

The Placer County plan calls for these second units to only be used for residents and not as tourist units. They would be deed restricted for affordability for 55 years. Obstacles, though, include needing to have a development right and residential allocation to build one. Combined those can cost about \$20,000.

The Placer plan would require the TRPA to make an exemption to current policy.

Two California laws take effect Jan. 1 to make it easier to convert illegal granny units into legal ones.

Several people who spoke applauded the efforts to make any inroads in creating affordable housing or at least implementing policy to make that a possibility.

Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery in large part agreed with Uhler.

She acknowledged not everyone got what they wanted. But she said the plan and lodge will be better for the environment, the economy and the social fabric.