

Myriad ideas spill forth for SLT at vision session

By Kathryn Reed

Could South Lake Tahoe become the outdoor capital of the world while at the same time providing enough affordable housing for those working here?

The answer, according to some residents, is a resounding yes.

The future of the city was the focus of Tuesday's City Council meeting. It was a workshop in advance of the Feb. 25 strategic planning session where decisions will be made. On Feb. 14 it was about hearing ideas from more than a dozen community members about their vision for the city.

Each councilmember was asked to invite three people who would each give a 15-minute presentation. The idea was to give more voices to the discussion. It also allowed the electeds to promote their own agendas. Councilmember Jason Collin told *Lake Tahoe News* he invited two people, but neither could make it.

Speakers in order:

- **Jude Wood, director of Lake Tahoe Boys & Girls Club – invited by Councilmember Wendy David**

The agency is losing its location at Al Tahoe Elementary School because Lake Tahoe Unified School District wants to return the building to a school. The Boys & Girls Club recognizes the need for its own building. Talks are under way with the city to move El Dorado County's vector control, with the idea of the club erecting a building on that site. This location would be walking distance to the rec center. Wood would like the building to be a community center.

Architecturally it could complement the new recreation center.

· **Chris McNamara, owner of Outdoor Gear Lab – Councilmember Austin Sass**

McNamara's 2030 vision for the city includes making Tahoe the outdoor capital of the world. Several speakers after him seized that sentiment with gusto. He wants Ski Run Boulevard, where his business operates and where he owns property, to be a downtown hub. He plans to have a pilot project on Ski Run for affordable housing. He asked for more flexibility with how commercial floor area is allocated so it is more predictable for those wanting to build or renovate.

· **Duane Wallace, South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce – Councilmember Tom Davis**

Housing needs to be the No. 1 priority. Wallace called it a crisis in the area with people not able to find a place to live that they can afford. He'd like to see less taxes and fewer regulations, especially for businesses.

· **Bonnie Turnbull, Nick Exline, Devin Middlebrook, sustainability proponents – Councilmember Brooke Laine**

Their message was about how climate change is already impacting the Lake Tahoe Basin. They want the city to operate on 100 percent renewable energy. This in turn could lead to branding and economic gains for South Lake Tahoe.

· **Brooke Hernandez, real estate agent – Davis**

She touted all the benefits to vacation home rentals, and the negatives if they were to go away. Hernandez said a problem is that no VHR permits have been revoked. Enforcement is critical.

· **Cheyenne Lane, Tahoe Youth & Family Services – David**

She spoke about the homeless situation in the area. With her

were two South Tahoe High School students who gave firsthand testimonials about what homelessness looks like. Lane would like \$20,000 from the city to match what El Dorado County has given to create a single point of entry process to collect data countywide.

- **David Orr, Tahoe Mountain Lab – Sass**

He believes jobs is the No. 1 issue for Tahoe. But Orr also said that without housing, there is no chance of attracting those jobs. Bandwidth has to increase, too, for people to relocate. He mentioned how Mammoth has faster download capabilities than Los Angeles. Orr would also like the town to have an identity, and embraced McNamara's idea. He wants electric vehicle stations to be throughout the region.

- **Tyler Cannon, owner of Sprouts – Sass**

Housing is an overriding issue for him, pointing to how he's lost employees because they couldn't afford to live here. He believes VHRs are contributing to the housing woes. Cannon wants tourist traffic out of neighborhoods. He would like better wayfinding signs, and bike paths that connect to destinations. While he was against paid parking when the city initiated it, now he wants to stop people from parking in front of his business all day if they aren't in his restaurant. Cannon also would like fines for people who don't pick up after their pooch.

- **Brooke Laine, Dave, Kurtzman, Jose Henriquez – Laine**

The trio spoke about creating a Tahoe County and what that would entail. Kurtzman gave some history from having been on the county redistricting committee. He pointed out that in 2020 or 2030 Tahoe is likely not to have a local representative on the Board of Supervisors based on population distribution. Henriquez, who heads LAFCO, outlined the details for this county conversion process. Laine touted all the benefits that could come of creating such an entity.

- **Jason Drew, Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce – Davis**

He talked about the need to have economic vitality, and embrace the chamber's 2020 vision. Chamber leader Craig Schmidt said the housing crisis and poor customer service are his main concerns.

- **Bill Roby, El Dorado Community Foundation – David**

He would like to take 3 percent off every home sale (so, out of the seller's pocket) to create a land bank, which would then buy old motels and convert them into long-term housing. The land bank would own the land and the people would own the structure/unit.

In the afternoon City Manager Nancy Kerry stirred the collective creative juices by showing videos of other locales. Dilapidated areas were repurposed into thriving destinations. This takes vision, dedication and collaboration.

Kerry talked about how the city has been visionary – pointing to the gondola coming into the middle of town and Harrison Avenue.

Opposition should not be a roadblock because not everyone is always going to agree on everything.

“Keep the long game in mind,” she said.

Department heads were more reality based instead of visionary, informing the council about what they are doing and the future they see.

- **Finance:** CalPERS is the biggest threat to the city's coffers, as the retirement agency keeps taking more from jurisdictions to pay for a defined benefit for retirees.

- **Recreation:** Need more staff, right now there are only four full-timers. This will especially be needed when the new

recreation center is built; construction should start in 2018. Pickleball has been a huge success, generating new recreation users. Last season Campground by the Lake had 50,000 campers.

- **Development Services:** Proud of community design guidelines. Hopes council makes Bijou Park Master Plan a priority. Studying commercial project trends to use it as a budgetary basis.

- **Public Works:** Praised how well Bijou erosion control project is functioning, how the bike park is a destination. Seventy-four percent of the city's fleet is beyond its service life; this doesn't include police and fire. A dedicated source to fund roads needs to be found. Vehicle replacement and road rehab need to be the priorities.

- **Police Department:** Property crimes are increasing. In terms of being a safe city, it is in the 37 percent level, with 100 percent being the worst.

- **Fire Department:** Responded to 3,239 calls in 2016. Second smallest department in basin, but the busiest. Three radio systems in the city between fire, police and public works is old and not working well. They should be updated so they all can talk to each other.

- **City manager:** Creating three new teams – talent and career development team because fewer people are going into government; strategic communications team; City Council priority team.

The next step is for the council to digest everything they heard on Tuesday. Nine days from now they will hash out the city's strategic plan among themselves. This will be the time they come forward with a blueprint for the immediate future, and possibly more long term.

As City Manager Kerry pointed out not everything the council or community members want to do can be done. Time, money and

resources are limiting factors. That is also why the strategic plan needs to be flexible, because priorities can change.