

SLT goal: Embrace Tahoe as national treasure

By Kathryn Reed

Unhook preconceived ideas. Steer rather than row. Visioning is to be unfettered and unconstrained.

Those were the instructions-sentiments of Ted Gaebler, author of “Reinventing Government” and a retired city manager who spent 50 years in local government. He facilitated the Feb. 25 South Lake Tahoe strategic plan meeting at Inn by the Lake. In addition to the five council members, 15 key staff were in attendance at the daylong session.

“Strategic planning is a process that a group goes through to allow people, not at the top necessarily, to take advantage of an unintentional opportunity or respond to an unanticipated crisis,” Gaebler said.

His goal was to get these 20 leaders to realize they can stop delivering some services and let the private sector do it, while at the same time the city can get into new businesses as long it isn't already served by the private sector.

With long term goals, it means the ability to capitalize on them when the opportunity presents itself.

Much of the wall space in the meeting room was filled with informative posters about the city – a map outlining what lands are publicly owned, investment projects, financial trends, completed and future projects (Lakeview Commons, Regan Beach, Sierra Tract erosion control, playfields), local agency partners, legacy action plan, and the community identity via other groups.



Ted Gaebler leads South Lake Tahoe officials Feb. 25 in a strategic planning session. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Sitting around four tables, individually they spent 10 minutes writing what they envision for the community – not just city government – by 2030. In other words, what can be accomplished in the next baker's dozen decade. Then at their tables they consolidated the thoughts. And from there they were to develop a composite to represent the entire room. Then they went through a similar process, only they shuffled the seating.

With Lake Tahoe across the street, and the drapes pulled back to see that bowl of blue shimmering, it was easy to capitalize on what makes this place special and unique. Focusing on the area being a global or national treasure resonated with everyone.

Tangibles rising to the top were – improving the built environment and better public transit. Some want to take the dilapidated buildings and either get rid of them entirely or rehab them into something functional and profitable. With transit, a monorail and cross lake ferry were mentioned, as well as bike-pedestrian paths that reach areas people want to go.

If South Lake Tahoe is a global treasure, then it needs to be treated like one. That has not happened based on how the infrastructure looks and functions. Maintenance concerns for years were not considered and it shows.

Going forward, though, the sentiment will be: "We will reflect the national treasure in which we live."

With saying "we" instead of "the city" the idea is this can be taken to agency partners to have them embrace the same vision.

Other ideas that many embraced included:

- Being able to redevelop waterfront areas for more public access.
- Events center on California side, even if it's not in the city limits. And therefore, have more year-round events.
- Face-lift for Highway 50.
- Need new economy that works; to be part of the 22nd century in the 21st. This new economy will fund the projects they envision.
- Having values to get to the vision.
- Getting fiber optics in place to handle high-speed Internet and the growing demand for all things technological.

Another exercise was working on one- and five-year visions. From the four tables, consensus was to find a funding source for roads, perhaps via raising sales tax.

Other ideas included removing blighted hotels, enforce the sign ordinance, break ground on the recreation center, new communications system for public safety, update fleet, resolve 56-acre ownership-management with El Dorado County, solve vacation home rental issue, build Greenway bikeway, and define site for events center.

At the end of the day there was conversation about what is going on in town and thoughts from the **Feb. 14 preplanning session**:

- A consultant is working with Harrison Avenue property owners regarding parking. The city's redevelopment agency owns three lots on Riverside Avenue that could potentially be paved over if someone were to buy them from what is now the Successor Agency. However, there is actually someone interested in those lots for housing.

- Regarding the collapsed building at Harrison Avenue, the owner intends to rebuild, but what and how remains to be determined.

- Parking lots for trailer parking will have to be used just for that now that the lake is up and the ramp at Lakeview Commons can be used.

- A desire to help the two South Shore chambers of commerce to play nice together.

- Talk of how affordable housing is an issue for a variety of reasons, from commodities to lack of supply.

- Tahoe Regional Planning Agency commodities were discussed.

- A suggestion made to have more workshops to hash out specific topics.

From here a business plan will be developed by staff that the council will adopt this spring.