

SLT seniors on losing end of city, county squabble



Seniors, foreground, on April 20 tell city and county officials that things need to change. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

While there are plenty of senior citizens on the South Lake Tahoe City Council and El Dorado County Board of Supervisors, leadership seems to be lacking – at least when it comes to how to manage a senior center.

Members of the two elected bodies, along with staff from both agencies met this week with seniors from the South Lake Tahoe facility. The seniors are tired of the squabbling between the two entities. They just want to be able get answers to some basic questions and know that they have a place to congregate for the indefinite future.

The conundrum is the county owns the building and the city has the lease to operate it. That lease expires in 2023. The lease says the city is supposed to handle routine maintenance. Defining “routine” is a stumbling block.

“Regarding the roof, we haven’t settled on who is responsible for it,” Supervisor Sue Novasel said. “We aren’t sure. We haven’t gotten to where we both agree.”

They’ve been talking for a year.



Ceiling panels are damaged from the leaky roof at the senior center. Photo/LTN

This winter was horrendous. Buckets were needed to catch the dripping water inside the building – which was still happening earlier this week. Ceiling tiles are damaged, so is the floor.

The city has said it will pay for the roof because it’s the right thing to do. The county – they haven’t offered to come forward with a dime for the structure; they just collect rent.

State law mandates the county provide certain programs. That’s their major contribution, even though each year when budget talks roll around there is the threat to dismantle Meals on Wheels.

Seniors mostly said they’d like the city to be in charge – even own the building. They know those people, have a relationship with them. This was obvious by the dialogue.

A bigger issue is what is to be done with the entire 56-acre

parcel. It's county owned, city run. This includes Campground by the Lake, Lakeview Commons, and where the library is.

The two government bodies this month entered into a \$60,000 agreement to have a feasibility study done to determine the value of the land, assets, and money making capabilities. (The county didn't want to rely on the city's figures.) The two entities are sharing the costs, though city taxpayers get to pony up more of the money since they are also county taxpayers. The study is expected to be completed in 90 days.

The city and county have squabbled for decades, and this acreage is just part of the pettiness. While in the past the city has said it would like ownership and full control, that drum isn't being beat so loudly anymore.

In the meantime, the seniors have a to-do list they'd like someone to approve. They have their own money, but the city can't just say yes, the county wants to approve changes to its building – as most landlords would want. But government moves slowly – even more slowly than the average senior, and that is what has those using the facility so exasperated. This building is like a home to many of them. It's where they meet friends, share what's going on. It might be their only human contact on any given day. They want the powers that be to start treating this like the sanctuary they revere and not just some building.