

Boys and Girls Club – not enough space for kids



Lake Tahoe Boys and Girls Club needs more room and a permanent space. Photo/Susan Wood

By Susan Wood

For over a decade, the Lake Tahoe Boys and Girls Club has represented a home away from home for hundreds of South Lake Tahoe youngsters.

Now it needs a home itself.

The thinking is eventually the Lake Tahoe Unified School District may want to reopen the **Al Tahoe Elementary School**, so shared use should be defined. The club took over part of those grounds in a year-to-year lease after the grade school closed in 2004 because of declining enrollment and through a reorganization of South Tahoe Middle School.

In that timeframe, the demand has mushroomed for the club on

Lyons Avenue. The organization serving ages 5-18 busts from the seams in satisfying the needs of children finding a window of opportunity to play and study between school and home.

The Boys and Girls Club of South Lake Tahoe has grown from 423 members to 731 between 2014 and 2017 – with at least 20 families on the waiting list, Executive Director Jude Wood told *Lake Tahoe News*.

“I think it’s a reflection of an economy improving,” Wood said.



Jude Wood is leading the South Shore Boys and Girls Club to greater independence.
Photo/Susan Wood

If both parents are working, the club serves as an ideal alternative to latchkey children or babysitters.

Even as the best alternative, the kids are outgrowing the

facility. During playtime, the recreation room is crammed with people. Backpacks line the hallway.

“We’ve outgrown it anyway,” Wood said.

The director and her staff have improvised nicely, but the dream is to cut a deal with the school district to build a new clubhouse next door where the portables are located.

Unlike club membership, school district enrollment is steady, but not surging.

The school district discussed the options with the club during a board meeting this fall. The trustees agreed to bring on an architect to survey suggested construction of a two-story, 10,000-square-foot structure adjacent to the gym and close to the ballfield.

The club is seeking a joint-use agreement with the district and expressed an openness to fund the design of a new place. The cost to build may be absorbed through donations, grants and other capital investment. Currently, the club renews its annual lease with the district every summer.

In exchange for a 50-year lease of the land, the club has offered to renovate Al Tahoe’s gym and kitchen, the latter being a vital resource serving more than 60 meals a day. Plus, the district would like to make the gym more multi-purpose.

“It’s a yearlong process. We’re doing our due diligence to see what’s best for the club,” Wood said.

Therein lies some advantages with the Al Tahoe location. It’s close to the middle school, library and the city recreation center and within steps from major bus and walking routes.

“It’s pretty realistic, but we have to get the architect involved,” trustee Barbara Bannar told *LTN*. “Absolutely we want to help them move forward. It’s their decision ultimately. Whatever choice they make – we’ll all be happy.”



Backpacks cluttering the halls is an indication of lack of space. Photo/Susan Wood

Certainly, Bannar said the school district has also seen the portable units outlive their useful state.

They would come out with the preferred plan, much to the liking of LTUSD Superintendent Jim Tarwater, who told *LTN* he'd push for seeing them go.

Tarwater has much faith in LPA architects from Roseville to build an ideal facility to meet state specifications. The firm designed the remodeled South Tahoe high and middle schools.

"The positive thing is (the club) having all that acreage and a playground with swings," the superintendent said. "The hardest thing for (the club) is buying land. There isn't any."

Other options exist, but perhaps not as attractive as rebuilding next door.

The city of South Lake Tahoe can relate to the plight. After wrestling with its own leaky, rundown recreation center on

nearby Rufus Allen Boulevard, it plans to rebuild. With plans through Measure P for the city to build a new recreation center, the Boys and Girls Club toyed with the idea of being roommates. But who's to say the club won't outgrow that location – especially since the youth organization seeks autonomy.

Besides talk of going into the Unity church site, El Dorado County may also have an option if it moves out of its vector control building on the same street. However, that relocation would require an environmental cleanup.

The county has conducted soil samples and found the land contaminated by pest-control chemicals. Another soil sample is slated to occur.

“We're interested in helping them any way we can – whatever works out for them,” said Tahoe's county Supervisor Sue Novasel, a past-president of the Boys and Girls Club. “But we need to do some mitigation out there.”

Novasel believes there's “no perfect option,” but the drawn-out process is “just what you have to deal with when dealing with land use.”