

Lake Tahoe Airport on path to being self-sufficient

By Kathryn Reed

Like most things in the basin, even Lake Tahoe Airport is seasonal. Sixty-eight percent of the landings are between May and October.

This was just one of the many statistics that was part of a workshop last month conducted by airport manager Mark Gibbs for the South Lake Tahoe City Council.

On the conservative side, the airport is bringing about 50,000 people to the area annually. The annual impact on the economy is more than \$1.27 million.

In 2015, there were 23,595 aircraft operations.

Gibbs' goal is to decrease the airport's impact on the city's General Fund, which today is a little more than a quarter million dollars each year. He told the council his focus is on economic vitality.

"We need to recognize and promote that fact," Gibbs said.

One way to do that is through events and leasing of airport facilities.

In 2017, the Marines were in town for 10 days. Beyond using the airport – refueling being a biggie – it meant 35 hotel rooms, dining and rental cars for the flyboys.

This year there will be a weeklong gay pilots fly-in event that is expected to attract more than 100 people.

Solar generation may be brought to the airport. This would save the city thousands of dollars each year in electric

bills.

The airport has 11 tenants who pay rent. Hertz is going to resume a limited car rental business at the airport.

Individuals who rent hangars account for 36 percent of the airport's revenues. Building more is possible.

Gibbs would also like to develop an aviation repair and maintenance facility.

A potential income source is developing the land the city owns around the airport. This would be a long-term revenue stream. While a music venue was talked about going there, the limited acreage silenced that idea.

"The whole South Shore has a storage shortage," Gibbs said. It's not that he wants the city to get into the storage business, but it would be possible to lease the land to someone who wants it for that purpose. This could be for boats/RVs or household items.

Gibbs shared that the Minden airport's largest revenue source is storage rental.

While the airport is able to rely on the Federal Aviation Administration to pay for the bulk of runway paving, the feds don't pay a dime when it comes to vegetation management even when safety is the overriding reason to do anything. And this is going to be a big issue for the airport in the coming years.

Trees are a safety issue for planes landing and taking off. Gibbs would like to create an annual airport timber harvest plan. The annual tree harvest ended in the 1990s because of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and League to Save Lake Tahoe's lawsuit against the airport.

While the airport has seen many changes through the years, it isn't going to close. As Gibbs pointed out, the feds have

listed it as one of the 100 most important airports in the country. It's a resource for military training, firefighting and is a life line to the outside world if roads into the basin were to be inaccessible.

"This airport is very important to the economy and to the nation," Gibbs said.