

Letter: Warm room degrading SLT neighborhood

Publisher's note: *This was sent to the South Lake Tahoe City Council and Lake Tahoe News.*

First let me say that I have been in and out of town intermittently this January so was not able to make the recent City Council meetings, or this would have been brought up in an open forum. However, the fact that no one from my neighborhood appeared at the recent meetings of the City Council is only because most of the people in my neighborhood work for a living and are not able to attend meetings in the middle of the day. It does not mean that we do not want to be heard or that everything is going well with the Warm Room.

While I am very glad that the children at South Tahoe Middle School and the Boys & Girls Club of Lake Tahoe have not had any issues with the homeless due to the warm room that has not been the case for the residents of Bijou Pines.

My neighborhood has been severely and negatively impacted by the homeless ever since the warm room opened. I have had two incidents of property stolen from my front yard – which is fenced and gated. I have also been panhandled twice while walking my dog in my neighborhood, once with my 7-year-old niece who was scarred to death by this vagrant.

Several of the homes whose owners are not winter residents and whose property backs up to the warm room have literally had to board up their windows and doors with wooden shutters and metal bars. Others in the neighborhood have put in security systems or upgraded their security systems with outdoor surveillance cameras.

In addition to the objects being stolen from people's yards, we have had several incidents of mail being stolen out of our

mailboxes. There have been incidents of the homeless walking around vacant summer homes and being questioned by the neighbors about what they are doing. The homeless are also marking the vacant summer homes in our neighborhood by piling up stones the way you would mark a trailhead, but they are marking empty homes. Why? All of these incidents have been reported by various residents. Many of the residents of Bijou Pines have lived here for 20 years or more, some for most of their lives and no one can remember ever having so many homeless roaming our neighborhood.

In a recent email sent to me by Marissa Muscat, the executive director for the Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless, I was told there were many people without shelter who congregated in the area or the warm room but did not stay there, thus, the Warm Room was not responsible for them. Well, that means very little to the residents of Bijou Pines as the homeless did not congregate in this area prior to the warm room opening. Bread & Broth has been at the Catholic Church for years and we have never before experienced the problems we are now having in our neighborhood.

I have asked both Mayor Wendy David, and Marissa Muscat to come and walk my neighborhood with me so they could see for themselves the impact of the warm room on Bijou Pines, however to date neither has shown an interest.

As to the security officer who sits at the corner of Rufus Allen and Pickett in the mornings – not very attentive. I myself, have stood next to his car while he did paperwork and never looked up. How many homeless could have walked by while he filled out forms? Also there are three other main entrances into Bijou Pines in short walking distance from the warm room that have no security on them at all. None of the residents of Bijou Pines feels that the Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless is providing adequate security for our neighborhood.

To make matters worse, at a recent meeting of several

concerned residents we found out that if one of us wanted to sell their home at this time we would have to declare that the warm room was within walking distance to our homes and depending how close your property was to the warm room your property value could be decreased by \$25,000. What right does the City Council have to devalue our property for the homeless?

While I feel very sorry for the homeless, the City Council should not have agreed to have the warm room back up to an historic residential neighborhood. To devalue our property in this manner is inexcusable.

I would like to remind the City Council that despite how sympathetic one might be to the homeless, they do not contribute to the city of South Lake Tahoe in any way. If anything, they strain our city's resources, and cause multiple problems for the residents. By contrast, my neighbors in Bijou Pines, work for a living, support themselves, take care of their property, and put money back into our city.

The residents of Bijou Pines pay their taxes, i.e. your salaries. I doubt that anyone in Bijou Pines will forget who on the City Council brought the homeless to our doorsteps.

Catherine Whelan, South Lake Tahoe