

SLT residents try to find answers to housing issues

By Kathryn Reed

Solutions to South Lake Tahoe's housing woes were in short supply during a talk about the issue on Wednesday.

Mayor Wendy David's monthly gathering was focused on housing last week, with planning staff (Kevin Fabino and John Hitchcock) there to provide the bulk of the information.

"There are a lot of things we could potentially do, but we need to always remember what TRPA will allow," Fabino told the group gathered at the South Lake Tahoe Senior Center on March 21. What he didn't share is what the city would/could do if the bi-state regulatory agency weren't in the picture.

One of the reasons the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency was created in the 1960s was to stop local jurisdictions from unregulated growth, especially after the most sensitive marsh in the basin was paved over to create the Tahoe Keys – in South Lake Tahoe.

Fabino and David pointed to the successes of turning some of the rundown hotels into more livable residential units.

"It's a good short-term solution. I'm not sure it's a long-term answer," Fabino said.

To build affordable housing as it's defined by the state where income needs to be verified and units are deed restricted is actually more expensive to build than market rate housing because of all the state requirements.

Land is a premium in the basin. Then there are the costs to do business. Of the \$60,000 in development fees the city collects, only \$6,300 of that is the actual building permit

fee. The rest is money that goes to other entities like the TRPA, sewer-water district, schools and air quality mitigation.

Heidi Hill Drum, who runs the Tahoe Prosperity Center, said that is why it would be better to look at assessing fees based on the square footage of a structure instead of a flat fee.

South Tahoe Public Utility District has reduced its sewer connection fee. That board is now contemplating allowing sewer hookups to be transferred, which would reduce the cost of construction.

Others at the talk advocated for businesses to provide housing for workers.

A representative from Heavenly Mountain Resort said of the approximately 1,500 winter employees the ski resort has there are beds for 72. This housing is at the bottom of Keller Road.

A former city worker suggested creating a higher transient occupancy tax for vacation home rentals and then using that money to create work force/affordable housing.

Someone else suggested dorm-style housing for workers. This is done at the CCC building in Meyers.