

Council to undertake South Tahoe Y Community Plan



Blight and empty buildings are the foundation of declaring a large segment of South Lake Tahoe a redevelopment area.

By Susan Wood

A bold plan to redevelop the better part of South Lake Tahoe will be before the City Council Tuesday. The ambitious plan could cost millions of dollars if the city has to acquire property and will require the cooperation of land and business owners – two things not everyone believes are achievable.

No longer just the Y, the proposal goes along Highway 50 to the Bijou area.

At the 9am meeting the council will vote on the draft redevelopment plan for the proposed South Tahoe redevelopment project known as Project 2.

Revitalization of the town's west-end area was known as the Tahoe Valley Community Plan two years ago. Community plans are requirements by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, but what is before the council goes beyond anything the bi-state regulatory agency mandates.

Two years ago, through the efforts of a citizen's group created by the city a plan was developed and abandoned.

It has become a launching pad for a redevelopment project area spanning a swath beyond the Lake Tahoe Airport along Highway 50, up 89 to West Way and continuing on 50 to Al Tahoe Boulevard. From there, it leapfrogs to Harrison Avenue down to Glenwood Way.

If the project goes forward, the formal public hearing will be next February.

Blight is the key word

There's a history for the city – one wrought with controversy over \$12 million spent on eminent domain, displaced businesses, its largest redevelopment project remaining a hole in the ground and some disgruntled citizens feeling the Y plan they spent two years on was ripped out of their hands.

The South Lake Tahoe Redevelopment Agency will review a 1-inch binder that essentially makes the case for redevelopment in an area so large it almost reaches the Ski Run-to-Stateline redevelopment zone.

In fall 2007, the city approved the revised survey area and contracted with Southern California consultant Fraser & Associates to reevaluate the level of blight in the area. The report concludes that 86 percent of the 2,681 parcels in the area are considered physically blighted.

More shocking, it continues to say, "The entire project area is affected by conditions of economic blight." Photos dot the

proposed plan, including the old Re/Max building near the Y labeled economically blighted just because it's empty.

The report highlights crime in the proposed redevelopment zone, using pictures of graffiti to make the point. It adds the need for investment in the Y area because it accounts for a third of the retail sales in town. Also mentioned is a 33-acre individual plan called the Mikasa Gateway that encompasses 49,000 square feet of commercial space. The idea is to position the boarded-up, privately owned shopping center as a retail destination.

The Tahoe Valley plan of 2007 calls for mixed commercial use, public plazas and native landscaping. The same goes for this one.

With the city's franchise agreement making the local government accountable, Lukins Brothers water customers have a right to an adequate system. This is why the city has included the water company in the latest redevelopment plan. The city has not found a way to rectify a huge problem that could have spelled disaster during the Angora Fire.

It will cost nearly \$30 million to fix Lukins' infrastructure, though the consultant had the outdated \$18 million figure. The small water company services more than 40 percent of the proposed redevelopment area's parcels.

Questions about businesses

Another section of the proposed plan highlights relocation assistance for businesses. The rules of participation declare the agency may buy land and improve the property "at fair market value from existing owners." For months, the city has contended it would not use eminent domain on residential properties in respect to the Tahoe Valley plan, but how far the city will go to push for its agenda appears questionable.

City Councilman and Redevelopment Agency board member Bill

Crawford, for years a critic of the government practice, insisted Sunday the city wouldn't opt for eminent domain based on recent board actions prohibiting its use.

"The city can't afford any more debt," Crawford said. "And I don't think the community would support it."

He has concerns about what's considered blight and references in the plan to tax increment, which is property tax aimed at servicing debt incurred through eminent domain. The city pays more than \$7 million each year to service the debt from Heavenly Village.

"The problem with redevelopment in this town is that redevelopment on the public side has been a failure," Crawford said. The latest example is the non-existent convention center.

It could be a bane and blessing to Pat Frega, who served as a city planning commissioner and a Tahoe Valley Community Plan committee member. Frega said that even after two years, a majority of the dozen citizens who served on the community group still feel the project "was hijacked" by a council subcommittee because "we were going on a different course than what they wanted."

Councilmen Ted Long and Hal Cole served on the subcommittee. Long no longer serves. Phone calls to Cole were unreturned. He is the liaison to the Tahoe Valley Community Plan and the architect of the convention center contract that did not include a performance bond.

"We told them we didn't want to see Stateline at the Y," Frega said, adding he's not happy with the magnitude of the project area.

Problems have arisen since then over the allowable height of buildings in the gateway district. At one point, the city was suggesting six-story structures, but that idea has since been

cut in half.

“I understand how cities would use redevelopment as a tool to jump-start community plans, but shouldn’t our energy be focused on what we’ve already started,” he said, referring to the stalled convention center project near Stateline.

Susan Wood is a freelance writer based out of South Lake Tahoe. She may be reached at copysue1@yahoo.com.

Community plans designed to be blueprint for basin

By Kathryn Reed

Paperwork and meetings seem to be synonymous with government. No wonder people tune out and get discouraged. Action and accomplishments seldom seem to be part of the equation.

Finding an answer for the need for 15 community plans throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin is easy – it’s a requirement of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. The bi-state agency has it as a must do in its myriad requirements.

“It is a guiding principle,” TRPA spokeswoman Julie Regan said of community plans.

Chapter 14 – Community Plans in the TRPA’s Code of Ordinances is 18 pages. The first page says, “The goal of the TRPA is to have all community plans completed by Dec. 1, 1989.”

The Tahoe Valley Plan, aka Y Community Plan, has had several hiccups. The latest incarnation will be before the South Lake

Tahoe City Council Sept. 15. Homewood kind of has a plan. It is tied to Placer County's General Plan.

As TRPA finalizes its regional, changes affecting community plans will be made. The 20-year regional plan is expected to be before the Governing Board in late 2010.

During a series of placed based planning meetings in 2006, input was sought from locals about what they want their community to look like and how this would meld with the entire basin. Pathways is supposed to reflect those opinions.

"(Community plans) are a tool to revitalize these different areas without them turning out to be all the same," said Teri Jamin before retiring this summer as South Lake Tahoe's community development director. "The process is not one size fits all."

Height, coverage and density restrictions placed on development by TRPA's current set of rules prove to be stumbling blocks for some looking to improve their property, according to Jamin.

TRPA's desire to blend living and working components of a municipality, where the bottom level could be shops and the top housing, is an indication of change.

"You want to make sure you are using the best available science and technology and information to achieve your goals," Regan said. "The current regional plan has not proved to be very flexible. Right now the current zoning is not really conducive to the density standards of mixed use."

Even though most of the community plans have been completed, not all have been implemented. Part of this has to do with a substantial number of property owners living outside the basin. Community plans are visions, not mandates – so nothing has to get done except for the paperwork.

The community plans around the lake include:

Stateline-Ski Run

Bijou-Al Tahoe

Tahoe Valley-Y

Y Industrial

Meyers

Kingsbury Grade

Round Hill

Stateline

Incline Village has three plans

Tahoe City

Carnelian Bay

Kings Beach

Kings Beach Industrial

Tahoe Vista

Homewood

Biomass plant in Kings Beach?

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Placer County officials are inching forward with plans to build a power plant in the environmentally sensitive Lake

Tahoe basin.

Officials expect plenty of tough questions and likely some vocal opposition, but they're convinced the proposed, one- to three-megawatt biomass plant would be good for the local environment.

[Read whole story](#)

Placerville hospital designated as trauma center

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

El Dorado County residents and visitors who suffer serious injuries may be able to avoid a trip outside the county for emergency medical care.

Placerville's Marshall Medical Center recently was designated a Level III trauma center by the El Dorado County Emergency Medical Services Agency, following an audit of the hospital's trauma program.

[Read whole story](#)

Body found at Yale presumed

to be Placerville woman

By Associated Press

NEW HAVEN, Conn. – Police on Sunday said they found what they believe is the body of a Yale University graduate student and bride-to-be hidden inside the wall of a university building where she was last seen five days before.

New Haven Assistant Police Chief Peter Reichard said officials are presuming the body was that of doctoral student Annie Le of Placerville, who has been the focus of a massive police search since Tuesday.

“It hasn’t been positively identified as of this time,” Reichard told reporters Sunday night. “However, we are assuming it is her ... so we are treating it as a homicide.”

Read the rest of the story

Tahoe roads less friendly to criminals post-Dugard



Lt. Les Lovell
-- changes
were made

after Jaycee
Lee Dugard was
kidnapped.
Photo/Lisa J.
Tolda

By Kathryn Reed

Code 50 – it was not in the vocabulary of law enforcement until after Jaycee Lee Dugard was kidnapped.

Her abduction in June 1991 soon led to the establishment of a collaborative policy that allows officers throughout the South Shore to work together to locate a suspect's vehicle.

“We can cordon off the South Shore. We do that by strategically placing patrol cars at undisclosed locations,” explained Lt. Les Lovell of the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department.

It's possible Highway 50 could be completely shutdown, with no access out of the basin. Roadblocks and searches are dependent on the nature of the crime.

No one will ever know if Code 50 had been in place June 10, 1991, if the vehicle containing then 11-year-old Dugard would have been stopped.

“In 1991, we put people out as strategically as we could with the resources we had that day. We couldn't cover everything,” Lovell said.

Those outside of law enforcement said the reaction time was slow – that it took a couple hours to start searching for vehicles. (It takes three hours to get from South Tahoe to Antioch, where the suspects took Dugard.)

Joining El Dorado County in the partnership are California and Nevada highway patrols, South Lake Tahoe Police Department,

and Douglas County Sheriff's Office.

Technology has changed in the last 18 years, too. This helps the perpetrators as well as law enforcement.

Amber Alerts now exist. Signs on highways throughout the basin can and have posted vehicle license plate numbers and descriptions of vehicles for other motorists to look out for.

Officers have computers and cell phones with which to communicate with each other.

GPS, MapQuest and the like are tools that can aid suspects. Those devices can help them avoid major thoroughfares.

That is one reason Lovell says officers won't be stationed just on the obvious roads.

Lovell said Code 50 has been used several times in the last 18 years. A memorable, though tragic time, was for 9-year-old Krystal Steadman in March 2000. Her body was eventually found dumped on Spooner Summit.

LTVA approves \$2.12 million budget

By Kathryn Reed

With Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority changing its fiscal year start from Oct. 1 to July 1, the bottom line is a bit skewed for the short year – October 2009-June 2010.

Jerry Bindel, who is on the South Shore tourism board, said revenues are down about 25 percent. The primary funding source

for the agency is the Tourism Improvement District, which assesses a fee on South Lake Tahoe properties; and the Tahoe-Douglas Visitors Authority, through a hotel tax in Douglas County.

The \$2.12 million budget for the 10-month period was approved Sept. 10.

Cuts include reduced hours at the visitors' centers and less staffing. The agency does not intend to help sponsor as many events as it would like.

It is bringing back opening days in June. The roads will not be closed like in 2008 when it was a traffic nightmare.

The sports commission has \$5,000 to spend.

To generate a sense of community some board members want to promote lights being strung along businesses during the holidays so the South Shore looks festive.

Some of the discussion that afternoon centered on the agency's website.

"It's in dire need of an upgrade," Bindel said after the meeting. "Some of us are pushing to make it a marketing piece and an advertising piece. We need to get them information, but we need to sell the story. We need great pictures that you can almost touch and feel that say what the community is about."

LTVA has been dragging its feet in joining the social network age. Facebook, Twitter and the like are not part of the agency's marketing component. More talk to do so was brought up last week. It was noted that it's cheaper to get the word out via the Internet than traditional media outlets.

The other thing with using the Internet is that it's a measurable resource in that the number of people who seek specific information can be tracked. This is not the case for radio, television and print media. It is not known how many

people heard a particular ad, saw it or read it.

The winter ad campaign is being delayed because people are booking their travel later and later. This is why Tahoe was not prominent in the ski-snowboard magazines this month.

“Get Your Vacation On” will be the summer 2010 campaign that is being developed by Duncan/Channon, the ad firm hired earlier this year to replace the company that developed the failed Blue World campaign.

More detailed concepts should be presented at LTVA’s October meeting.



Tahoe remembers Sept. 11



The JROTC
color guard
and South Lake
Tahoe

residents at
the Sept. 11
ceremony.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Flags flew at half-staff throughout the country on Friday – and Tahoe was no different.

Patriots Day, as Sept. 11 has been named, has become a time to reflect on those who lost their lives eight years ago when terrorists hijacked four planes and forever changed the lives of most Americans.

South Lake Tahoe's ceremony focused on the importance of first responders. More than 400 died when the Twin Towers in New York were reduced to ash. It doesn't matter if it is called heroism or they were "just" doing their job – they paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Much was said about the local men and women in uniform as the back row was filled with South Lake Tahoe firefighters, South Lake Tahoe police officers and El Dorado County sheriff's personnel.

The more than 60 people in attendance at the American Legion also were told not to forget Tim Smith and Brandon Williams – two young men with ties to the South Shore who died fighting in Iraq.

"I think this was the best we've had," Carol Olivas, secretary for the American Legion, said of this year's ceremony. "It seemed like everyone had a little fire in their speeches."

\$2.5 million repair job at Lake Tahoe Airport



Construction at Lake Tahoe airport will continue into October.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

A pilot watching the construction at Lake Tahoe Airport on Friday said the ramp was so bad you could lose an airplane in one of the holes.

Although that sentiment is a gross exaggeration, the truth is the state of disrepair was so bad that pilots would avoid the area for fear of having asphalt sucked into an engine.

A \$2.5 million grant from the FAA is paying to for the terminal ramp area to be resurfaced with concrete. The work is expected to be finished by the end of October.

“The asphalt (was) in extremely poor condition, making it hazardous for aircraft to transfer across the ramp and park at the ramp,” said Sherry Miller, airport director.

Besides the ramp work, a de-icing system is being installed.

“There was some question whether we needed this or not because we don’t have commercial service and the smaller planes don’t like to leave in winter weather,” Miller said.

The couple of planes that are de-iced each year use a mist system that Miller said does not reach the ground and therefore didn’t present a contaminant issue for the nearby Upper Truckee River.

The new system will have an oil-water separator.

With the FAA paying for the system, now seemed a good time to install the de-icer while the area is a construction zone.

Angora Fire fraud suspect can’t post bail

By Kathryn Reed

Former Red Cross employee John Hellman is behind bars in El Dorado County Jail in Placerville on charges stemming from allegedly taking money that was intended for survivors of the 2007 Angora Fire.

Hellman’s bail was set at \$150,000. He is charged with 11 counts of grand theft.

He is accused of taking \$16,000 from the organization that was assisting the 254 households that lost their homes in the June 2007 fire on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe.

The 49-year-old was arrested by authorities in August in Texas and then extradited to California.

The Sacramento Red Cross office discovered what it calls "financial malfeasance" in January during a regular audit.

"In the course of the internal audit we came across some discrepancies," said Carol Evans, spokeswoman with the Red Cross in Sacramento.

She said her organization wants Hellman to pay back the money he allegedly stole.

Hellman had an office in the Community Disaster Resource Center in South Lake Tahoe. This group was formed after the June 2007 Angora Fire to help people living in the burn area.