

Fanny Bridge project to start in May

Construction on the Highway 89-Fanny Bridge Community Revitalization Project in Tahoe City is expected to start May 1, with completion later this year.

The Central Federal Lands Highway Division of the Federal Highway Administration is the lead agency for construction, with Martin Brothers Construction doing the work.

The project includes realignment of the highway, a new bridge over the Truckee River located east of the Caltrans Maintenance Yard along Highway 89 heading into Tahoe City from Truckee, three roundabouts, complete street improvements within the project area – new sidewalks, crosswalks, street lights, and street/trail signage, replacing Fanny Bridge with sidewalks and bike lanes on both sides, including a new bridge rail that will match the existing bridge rail, new and/or improved bike and pedestrian paths, and a Tahoe City gateway signage.

More study needed on Tahoe City firehouse redevelopment

After hearing two proposals for redeveloping the Tahoe City firehouse properties near Commons Beach in Tahoe City, the Placer County Board of Supervisors last week directed staff to further study the financial and development feasibility of the ideas.

The county-owned Tahoe City firehouse properties include the former North Tahoe Fire Station 51, Tahoe Community Center building and the former visitor center building.

Placer began searching for a partner to redevelop the properties in November.

The first proposal, The Commonwell, features a market hall concept similar to the Ferry Building in San Francisco, coupled with community amenities like an outdoor pool and waterfront amphitheater. It would also include seasonal lakeside retail, a plaza deck and ground-level parking underneath the project site.

The second proposal, Siren Arts at Tahoe City, features flexible-use performance space that could accommodate up to 250 people, combined with retail and exhibition galleries, artist studios and multi-use classrooms. It would also include a rooftop deck, kitchen, office space for local cultural non-profit organizations and workforce housing.

County staff applied for a \$250,000 Tahoe Tourism Master Plan grant to cover the costs for further study of the projects' and site's financial feasibility.

Late winter storms bad omen for fire season

By Associated Press

The late winter storms that helped bolster Nevada's lagging snowpack also jump started the growth of grasses and brush that potentially could fuel another big wildfire season.

"I hate to use the term 'worst-case scenario,' but it's kind of leading into another potentially very active fire season," National Weather Service meteorologist Chris Smallcomb told Gov. Brian Sandoval Wednesday.

Smallcomb said the late precipitation push in March raised the snowpack from 36 percent of normal in February to 85 percent of normal as of March 27 at Tahoe.

Read the whole story

Burning Man founder Larry Harvey dies

By Jenny Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

The unapologetic, silver haired, Marlboro-loving eccentric credited with creating Burning Man, now a 68,000-person arts celebration held in the middle of the Northern Nevada desert, died Saturday morning. He was 70.

Harvey suffered a massive stroke on April 4 in San Francisco. He was since in critical condition at a Bay Area hospital.

"Our founder, friend, and original instigator, Larry Harvey has passed away," wrote Marian Goodell, one of the original Burning Man founders, on Saturday.

Read the whole story

Short-term lodging, and who is renting them

By Sage Sauerbrey, Moonshine Ink

Short-term rentals have rapidly become a polarizing topic. While property rights advocates argue for the freedom to utilize their homes as assets and housing advocates point to a decline in long term rental inventory being a result, the local jurisdictions are caught in the crossfire and have thus far been treading carefully and cautiously.

It's a heated discussion, and in fact multiple sources requested not to be named in this story for that very reason. But, people are speaking up, and it appears that action to find a balance between these two schools of thought may be on the horizon.

The short-term rental market has skyrocketed locally and nationally in a few short years. In Truckee, the number of Airbnb units is currently growing at 65 percent a year, according to AirDNA. Strict rental ordinances recently were put in place nearby in South Lake Tahoe, and across the country, sister mountain hamlets have approached the pros and cons associated with the house sharing economy in diverse ways. All of these factors have thrown the issue into sharper focus as communities scramble to address the issue.

Read the whole story

Housing discrimination thrives 50 years after Fair Housing Act tried to end it

By Prentiss A. Dantzler, The Conversation

In the midst of riots in 1968 after civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. was slain, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Fair Housing Act.

The federal legislation addressed one of the bitterest aspects of racism in the U.S.: segregated housing. It prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion and national origin when selling and renting housing.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD, has administered the act with some success. From 1970 to 2010, the share of African-Americans living in highly segregated neighborhoods declined by half. But in areas that remained highly segregated in 2010, there were no signs of improvement. In several cities, such as Baltimore and Philadelphia, average levels of segregation had actually increased.

My scholarship on public housing and residential mobility demonstrates that where African-American people live is often still limited by discrimination.

Meanwhile, HUD – the department charged with ending housing discrimination – has shifted much of its focus away from that core mission to instead promote economic self-sufficiency.

The effect of this change could mean the discrimination that continues to exist will remain, and people of color will continue to have limited options for housing, attend lower-performing schools and experience poorer health outcomes.

Refocusing HUD's mission

The Fair Housing Act's dual mission was to eliminate housing discrimination and to promote residential integration. The communities its authors imagined were desegregated and open to all people.

The first HUD secretary, Robert C. Weaver, believed such places would allow for a diverse mix of people and housing options. This founding tenet is reflected in the mission statement HUD has used since 2010: "HUD's mission is to create strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all."

However, HUD's current secretary, Ben Carson, appointed by President Trump, has proposed a new mission statement. It reads: "HUD's mission is to ensure Americans have access to fair, affordable housing and opportunities to achieve self-sufficiency, thereby strengthening our communities and our nation."

One of the key differences between these two mission statements is the goal. While the former focused on building inclusive communities, the new mission focuses on individuals being self-sufficient. This shift reflects an age-old debate about the role of the government in helping poor people secure housing. Recent actions by conservatives suggest they are interested in decreasing government assistance for housing to poor people.

For example, the White House's fiscal year 2019 budget proposal called for slashing HUD's funding by \$8.8 billion. Shortly thereafter, HUD Secretary Carson tweeted, "The proposed budget is focused on moving more people toward self-sufficiency through reforming rental assistance programs and moving aging public housing to more sustainable platforms."

On March 23, in lieu of a government shutdown, Congress passed an omnibus bill that actually added money to HUD's budget. Yet, there is still a possibility that the White House will

rescind some of these increases. Conservatives are still split on whether or not they should go against their deal with liberals to save money. This could drastically change the way HUD operates over the next year.

Diminishing role of government

Such efforts to diminish the government's role in providing housing assistance to the poorest populations is based on historic ideas on the causes of poverty.

Poverty, some people argue, is caused by an individual's lack of motivation. Blaming other factors out of their control, according to this line of thinking, is a way of not accepting responsibility. This idea is now being translated into housing policy.

The focus on economic self-sufficiency is not new. Starting in the 1980s, HUD linked housing programs and policies with efforts to increase an individual's ability to support themselves without government assistance.

Promoting self-sufficiency isn't a bad idea. Raising the income levels of low-income people is a useful endeavor, since housing is often the largest expense among families.

But here's the problem with focusing on self-sufficiency: It creates the illusion that where people live is solely their choice. It's not. The market dictates where people can live, and so does discrimination by landlords and mortgage lenders.

Incomes in the U.S. are not increasing at the same rate as housing costs. And as the economy is bouncing back from the Great Recession, housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable for people at nearly all income levels.

So getting people off of housing assistance, while providing training so they can get higher-paying jobs, does not mean they can find affordable housing in the neighborhood of their

choice.

To be effective, housing policies must address, not ignore these challenges. A full return to the spirit with which the Fair Housing Act was passed could be a step in the right direction.

If the Fair Housing Act has taught us anything in the last 50 years, it has highlighted that attaining affordable housing is a problem for many people. Focusing on self-sufficiency and turning a blind eye to housing discrimination shifts the focus of housing policy in the United States away from building “inclusive and sustainable communities free from discrimination.”

Prentiss A. Dantzler is an assistant professor of sociology and urban studies at Colorado College.

Meetings all about cannabis cultivation in Placer County

Placer County staff will host three drop-in meetings in May to answer questions about rules for cannabis cultivation, and the county’s compliance and enforcement process.

Placer’s cannabis ordinance, allowing limited cultivation for personal use only, became effective in January 2017. It allows cultivation of up to six non-medical plants on 50 square feet or cultivation of 50 square feet of medical cannabis for personal use, but bans all commercial activity related to cannabis including cultivation, processing, manufacturing, delivery and distribution.

Fines for non-compliance range from \$500 per plant over the six plant limit up to \$5,000 a day for commercial activities including cultivation, manufacture or distribution.

Session details:

Sheridan – May 4, noon-3pm, Stewart Hall, 6005 Camp Far West Road, Sheridan

Auburn – May 11, noon-3pm, Placer County Community Development Resource Agency, Cypress Room
3091 County Center Drive, Auburn

Alta – May 18, noon-3pm, Alta Community Center, 33950 Alta Bonny Nook Road, Alta.

An evening session will be scheduled in the near future to accommodate those working traditional business hours.

What snowpack says about the water year

By Ian Evans, Water Deeply

The most significant reservoirs in the West are not stored behind concrete dams, but on top of mountains as snowpack. This year, however, snowpack has been alarmingly low throughout most of the West.

“If you look at the overall flow of the Colorado River – at Lake Powell, the main measurement point for the entire Colorado River Basin, it’s less than half of normal,” said John Fleck, director of water resources at the University of New Mexico.

That low flow impacts cities, agriculture and Western ecosystems for the rest of the year, if not longer. Already the Rio Grande River is so low that researchers are rescuing stranded fish by carrying them to wetter parts of the river. In California, instead of snow, the state experienced record-breaking wildfires and floods. Throughout most of the winter rainy season the state looked like it was headed for another devastating drought after only one year of relief.

Read the whole story

Climate change is messing with your dinner

By Agnieszka de Sousa and Hayley Warren, Bloomberg

The world's dinner tables are seeing the impact of climate change.

As cold regions become warmer, and warm places hotter still, farming and fishing are shifting. An evolving climate means big changes for people who grow, catch and rear for a living, and everyone else who buys and eats what they produce.

There are winners and losers. There are rich-world problems (less cod, more lobster) and poor (drought and pestilence). There are threats to the quality of the world's basic staples including wheat and corn, as well as such nation-defining luxuries as Bordeaux wine and Java coffee. And whether through dearth or deluge, supply shocks can shake up prices.

As temperatures rise, the best growing conditions for many crops are moving away from the tropics, and from lower lying

land to cooler climbs. Fish and other underwater catches, too, are migrating to colder seas as their habitats warm.

Read the whole story

Billions of gallons of water saved by thinning forests

By Cheryl Dybas, National Science Foundation

There are too many trees in Sierra Nevada forests, say scientists affiliated with the National Science Foundation Southern Sierra Critical Zone Observatory.

That may come as a surprise to those who see dense, verdant forests as signs of a healthy environment. After all, green is good, right? Not necessarily. When it comes to the number of trees in California forests, bigger isn't always better.

That's in part because trees use lots of water to carry out basic biological tasks. In addition, they act as forest steam stacks, raking up water stored in the ground and expelling it as vapor into the atmosphere, where it's accessible to humans and forest ecosystems only when it falls back to Earth as rain and snow.

Read the whole story