

Letter: How to curtail Tahoe gridlock

To the community,

Here is a possible temporary solution to the traffic gridlock that we currently experience every Sunday afternoon here at South Lake Tahoe.

From Meyers to Twin Bridges:

On Sunday afternoon: only westbound traffic would be allowed on both lanes at 1, 3 and 5pm – and eastbound traffic allowed only at 1:30 and 2:30p, and then normal after 6pm.

Yes, it would require lots of signage, traffic guidance personnel by Caltran, and public education by Caltrans and other local papers. And of course a pilot car – with front crash rigs equipped – to lead the lane closures as required.

It would be a lot less expensive than an undesirable four-lane highway all the way in. A long-term solution would be to limit the number people in the Tahoe basin at one time, but that will only come a long time after I'm gone.

Jim Hildinger, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: SLT failing when it comes to street repair

Publisher's note: *The following letter was read by Brady Hodge at the Jan. 19 South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting and is*

reprinted with permission.

I don't have to remind anyone in this room that the reason this city was formed in 1965 was for better basic essentials, including police, fire, snow removal, and street maintenance resulting through local control.

The poor and deteriorated and neglected condition of the streets in this city is failing one of the basic commitments made by this city when it was founded.

The poor condition of the streets, and complaints by residents and property owners in the Tahoe Keys, have forced the property owners association to form a separate, special committee just to address this one issue.

The Tahoe Keys provides the city with significant revenue streams:

- The 1,529 Tahoe Keys properties are the source of over 20 percent of the city's residential property taxes.
- The 328 VHRs, at last count, located in the Tahoe Keys are paying annual license fees and substantial transient occupancy tax to the city.

For the city to fail to reinvest in the infrastructure of these neighborhoods by allowing the streets to deteriorate to the point that they're at today, is incomprehensible. The poor condition of the streets in this city is deplorable, and disgraceful.

The streets in the Tahoe Keys represent only 9 percent of the city's streets. Yet to my recollection, the only street in the Tahoe Keys that's been repaved by the city during the last 20 years is a portion of Venice Drive. TKPOA – the property owners association – has done more repaving than the city during this time; it repaved Kokanee and Marconi when it replaced water lines. The only other street paving work has been done piecemeal by water and utility companies and the

[California Tahoe] Conservancy.

And the poor condition of many of the streets in other neighborhoods throughout the city is even worse than in the Keys.

This is not a record to be proud of. My opinion, and that of many of my neighbors and other city residents, is that the poor condition of the streets in this city is by far the city's most serious problem today.

Why are these streets in such poor shape? The responsibility for these crumbling streets rests directly upon your shoulders. Something has to change. The responsible thing to do would be to rearrange priorities to budget annually for pavement maintenance and replacement to return the city's streets to their prior, more acceptable condition.

Letter: Kiwanis repeat helpers at Bread & Broth

To the community,

For the past five years, the Kiwanis Club of Tahoe Sierra has been sponsoring Bread & Broth Adopt A day of Nourishment on the second Monday in the month of January. True to form, on Jan. 11 Kiwanis Club of Tahoe Sierra members Jan Lynds, Pat Frega and Bob "Snow Bum" Fleischer were there pitching in at B&B's evening dinner.

The Kiwanis Club's annual sponsorship is always appreciated by B&B and the B&B volunteers always look forward to working with our repeat sponsor volunteers.

Frega has been a frequent sponsor volunteer and is now an experienced helper at the B&B dinners that he attends. For Lynds and Fleisher, this was their first time at a B&B dinner and they both were great novice volunteers. Packing giveaway bags, setting up the dessert and drink table, manning the serving line and helping with cleanup makes for a long three hours, but all of the Kiwanis volunteers stayed through the end of the evening.

“What a wonderful experience! This is one of the things volunteering is all about,” said Fleisher. “Great food was served, well appreciated by the many served with a delicious meal. Great helpers, cooks and cleanup crews.”

All of B&B’s helpers are volunteers and without them there would be no Monday dinners for the hungry of our community. However, there also would be no Monday dinners without the financial support of organizations like the Kiwanis Club of Tahoe Sierra. Working together with our volunteers, donors and sponsors, B&B has been able to ease hunger in the South Tahoe community for the last 26 years.

To partner with B&B as a donor or sponsor, contact me at 530.542.2876 or carolsgerard@aol.com

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Letter: Is Tahoe at its tipping point?

To the community,

We tried to go skiing at Squaw earlier this month, but after

two hours into a 30-minute commute we had to turn around. It was Jan. 10, a Sunday and it should have been reasonably busy, but not gridlock. So are traffic jams on off peak weekends the new normal for our area? Traffic was backed up from Squaw to Truckee. OK, so gas is cheap and we finally have snow, but aren't we supposed to have snow in the winter?

A Jan. 8 *Sierra Sun* opinion piece entitled, "We owe an apology to Lake Tahoe and the Sierra Nevada" submitted by TRPA, the Tahoe Fund and others was particularly ironic since TRPA has been central to this issue by promoting new large development projects such as Boulder Bay, and Homewood without any consideration for the harsh reality that we don't have a comprehensive transportation system, adequate fire evacuation, or necessary infrastructure. The reality is there isn't any planning or social engineering to manage all the crowds and litter. Ten pounds can't fit in a 5-pound bag.

Worse yet, TRPA has given a wink of approval to the Martis Valley West/Brockway Campground debacle that plops thousands of people on the ridge at Brockway Summit. Fact: our region is at or over capacity many times throughout the year. The Tahoe Fund is fueled by and has become the PR arm for large developers. It's great that they are all so chummy, but where does that leave the public? Small conservation groups are left with having to protect Tahoe from phony traffic studies and bogus environmental analysis.

I'm not saying I want five lanes like the South Shore, but obviously we need transportation solutions, not rhetoric. Token signs saying "Take Care" are a nice idea, but funds should be allocated for enforcement. When you have as many visitors as Tahoe does (I've heard 4-plus million/year) there will always be a trash problem. Since Tahoe is close to the large population areas of Reno, Sacramento and San Francisco, shouldn't we have a maximum number of visitors? Should there be a fee to handle impacts and transportation solutions? Should there be a penalty consequence for littering? Should

Lake Tahoe become a national park? Maybe TRPA and the other authors of the article owe those that love and respect Lake Tahoe an apology for failing to plan for the real problems associated with increasing tourism.

TRPA, look to the dangerous development policies you promote and come up with realistic enforcement solutions. For the first time, I'm hearing visitors saying they are "rethinking Tahoe" as a getaway. It's time to think outside the box before we all get boxed in.

Ann Nichols, president North Tahoe Preservation Alliance

Opinion: Affordable housing a middle-class crisis in Calif.

By Christopher Thornberg

Debate about California's housing crisis typically revolves around low-income households. More than 90 percent of California families earning less than \$35,000 per year spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing.

This isn't new; that percentage has been stubbornly high for years. Nor is this an exclusively Californian problem—the comparable figure for the U.S. is 83 percent.

What is new and disturbing is that the crisis is now spreading to middle-income households, families earning between \$35,000 and \$75,000 per year.

In 2006, 38 percent of middle-class households in California used more than 30 percent of their income to cover rent. Today, that figure is over 53 percent. The national figure, as

a point of comparison, is 31 percent. It is even worse for those who have borrowed to buy a home—over two-thirds of middle-class households with a mortgage are cost-burdened in California—compared to 40 percent in the nation overall.

The social costs of this middle-class housing crisis are not sufficiently appreciated. Middle-income families have less money to spend on other goods and services—and that creates huge losses across the economy. It forces California employers to pay higher wages than elsewhere in the nation, raising costs for California consumers and diminishing the state's competitiveness. Some middle-class households leave California in search of affordable housing, depriving the state of young, skilled workers who represent the state's future.

The housing crisis is a classic problem of supply and demand. The state doesn't build enough housing to accommodate its population growth. California is home to roughly 13 percent of the nation's population, and has slightly greater than average population growth. Yet, over the last 20 years the state has accounted for only 8 percent of all national building permits.

To put the shortage in context, consider the amount of housing that would need to be built in order to move the state to national norms for housing stock, vacancy rates, and crowding: California would need to expand its stock by between 6 and 7.5 percent—that's between 800,000 and a million additional residential units. In Los Angeles County, where the situation is far more acute, the state would need to add 180,000 to 210,000 units, between 12 and 14 percent of the total.

These figures dwarf the meager efforts policymakers are proposing to fix the problem. The bill known as AB35, recently vetoed by Gov. Jerry Brown, would have raised \$1.5 billion over five years—to build a mere 3,000 affordable housing units. Another piece of legislation, AB 2, proposed a new form of tax-increment financing to partially replace the redevelopment agencies the governor closed. The redevelopment

system only managed to build 10,000 affordable housing units in a decade.

Why is it so hard to build? The state has stiff regulations regarding construction quality, high labor costs (in part because construction workers also need to handle their own high housing costs!), higher land costs, and fees and expenses charged to developers by local governments. But taken together, these obstacles do not provide a complete explanation for the shortage of housing.

If you were to compare the same newly built house in California and Texas, the California house would typically sell for twice as much as the one in Texas. If you were to add up all the additional costs of building that house in California—land costs, permit fees, construction code—the number would not fully explain the gap in prices. The gap is much wider. In other words: builders make a lot more profit building a house in California than they do in Texas.

What's different here? The state has erected two giant barriers to entry: Proposition 13 and the California Environmental Quality Act, known as CEQA.

Proposition 13 limits the value of housing to local governments by keeping property taxes much lower than in other parts of the United States. So California's local governments—at least the ones that are fiscally wise—do not encourage residential investment, since it produces less in taxes. The state's CEQA law imposes similar costs on growth. It forces developers to mitigate excessive disruptions they might create in the natural or urban environment. The problem is that "excessive" is being interpreted to mean "any" in the current application of the law.

Is there any conversation about reforming CEQA in Sacramento? None. Any chance of reforming Proposition 13? Very little.

And so, California families continue to face a very real

housing crisis. And the state leaders are not helping.

Christopher Thornberg is the founding partner of Beacon Economics LLC and the director of the UC Riverside School of Business Administration Center for Economic Forecasting and Development. Thornberg previously worked on the UCLA Anderson Forecast and received his doctorate from UCLA. He wrote this for Zocalo Public Square.

Letter: Azul Latin Kitchen gives back to SLT

To the community,

Azul Latin Kitchen was the Adopt A Day of Nourishment sponsor for the Bread & Broth dinner served at St. Theresa Church Grace Hall on Jan. 4. It is a great fit to have the Tahoe restaurant join with B&B to provide meals to local individuals who are in need of hot nutritious food along with a warm and secure place to spend an hour or two during Tahoe's very cold winters.

"It is so fulfilling to bring a group from our restaurants. We all truly enjoyed helping prepare for and serve dinner tonight," said Danny Scott, Azul Latin Kitchen's manager.

Also volunteering with Scott were Emilie Kapp, server; Natashia Nielson, host; and bartenders Rachel Ervin and Chris Arnold.

"It is very important that we are able to give back to our community. We can't wait to do it again," added Scott.

Azul Latin Kitchen has formed a unique and very much

appreciated partnership with B&B. In addition to sponsoring Adopt A Day dinners, Azul team members donate their time to come and serve on B&B's dinner cleanup crew three to four times a month. It might not be glamorous, but helping to clean up after the Monday evening dinner is just as important as any other part of the pieces necessary to provide meals to about 100 folks every Monday.

A big thank you to Tahoe Restaurant Group's management and Azul Latin Kitchen team members for bringing their food serving and customer service expertise to provide a wonderful evening for our dinner guests.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Letter: Importance of mentoring

To the community,

January is National Mentoring Month. Here in South Lake Tahoe, Tahoe Youth & Family Services supports a mentoring program and is in need of more adult mentors for children in this community.

I have been a part of this program for over seven years mentoring the same girl and occasionally her older sister. It has been a positive and fulfilling experience for me and, I hope, for them. Mentoring allows children to be exposed to new and different experiences beyond what they might receive at home, broadening their awareness of the world and giving them additional support from other adults.

I have enjoyed sharing my passions – this includes nature walks, museums, theater, dance, library visits, standup paddle boarding, camping, and skiing. They, in turn, have shared their interests with me including love of animals (especially dogs), music, fashion, family and friends. They have shared their challenges and frustrations and I have listened and discussed potential solutions. They have shared accomplishments and we have celebrated.

They have taught me so much about acceptance, flexibility and adapting to life's losses and disappointments. And because they are children, they remind me of the importance of play and the simple joys and pleasures of life. I have become part of their family and they have become a part of mine. I have observed their increased confidence and improved communication skills. Both girls plan to attend college and are working to succeed in school.

I hope you will consider volunteering as a mentor. Tahoe Youth & Family Services requests a commitment of four hours per month. The choices of how you spend your time are up to you and your mentee. What is important is the time you spend dedicated to a child. Many children do not receive much one-on-one attention when parents work long hours and there are other children in the home. Research has found children are more likely to stay in school and avoid drugs and alcohol when they have mentors or other adults in their life in addition to their parents.

For more information about becoming a mentor, or how to have a mentor for your child, contact Tahoe Youth & Family Services at 530.541,2445.

Lauri Kemper, Meyers

Opinion: Snowfall a good sign for Tahoe

By Joanne Marchetta

The New Year is getting off to a phenomenal start with snow falling at Lake Tahoe. It seems long ago since we've had snow around the lake, but as California and Nevada continue to grapple with four years of drought and water shortages, the snow couldn't be falling at a better time.

A snow survey this January by California Department of Water Resources found 54 inches of snow at Echo Summit. That's 16 inches above average for this time of year. And it's significantly more snow than we saw last April when the snowpack is usually at its greatest but surveyors found no accumulated snow on the ground.



Joanne
Marchetta

The first snowy winter in years is boosting Lake Tahoe's economy, bringing tourists to our ski resorts and hotels. That's welcome news for many people in our communities who depend on winter recreation for their livelihood.

But the snow is benefitting more than our businesses and skiers. A strong storm that hit the Sierra several weeks ago dropped more than 4 billion gallons of water into Lake Tahoe, quickly raising the lake's level by 2 inches. The lake is

still more than a foot below its natural rim, but the storm showed how our lake and parched forests stand to benefit from this return of winter weather.

An El Nino system in the Pacific Ocean promises to bring more heavy precipitation to California in the months to come—perhaps even too much precipitation for some communities bracing for mudslides and flooding. But as much-needed snow and rain fall on our region for the first time in years, we must not grow complacent about our need to adapt to a changing climate.

Just a few days after this month's heartening snow survey at Echo Summit, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported that 2015 was the second hottest year on record for the United States. NOAA recorded warmer than average temperatures throughout the American West, and noted that last year was also the 19 straight year that annual average temperatures have exceeded the 20th century average.

A study published in December found lakes around world—more than half of the world's freshwater supplies—are warming faster than the oceans and the atmosphere. Here at Lake Tahoe, our annual average air and water temperatures have also been increasing.

Climate change was a major topic at Operation Sierra Storm, a conference hosted at Lake Tahoe this January. The annual event brought together meteorologists and weather and climate experts from around the country to talk about climate change. The experts' message was loud and clear: Climate change is occurring and we need to take steps now to prepare and adjust.

Fortunately, we're seeing progress on that front. Nearly 200 nations at the United Nations climate summit in Paris last month agreed to take voluntary steps to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to fight climate change. Countries are coming together as never before and realizing the need to

work together on climate change.

But we cannot rely on national governments or even state governments to fight the effects of climate change we will see and feel right here at Tahoe. We must work to make our local communities and environment as healthy and resilient as possible. We need to think globally and act locally, and that's exactly what we're doing at Lake Tahoe.

With more frequent and longer dry conditions, fire risk rises. Government agencies around Lake Tahoe are removing hazardous fuels from our forested public lands to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk around our communities. That work is seeing a strong financial boost with \$3 million in grant funding for Tahoe that the U.S. Bureau of Land Management announced this January.

Communities around Lake Tahoe are building trails and bike lanes so people can get to work, school, and shopping and recreation areas without getting in cars. Our work to improve Lake Tahoe's electric vehicle charging infrastructure and create a seamless regional transit system will also pay dividends in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.

Local, state, and federal governments around Lake Tahoe are working on many fronts to address the changing climate and prepare our region for its impacts. But there are many things residents and businesses can do to help. Our award winning Lake Tahoe Sustainability Action Plan identifies many simple steps that individuals can take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The plan is available **online**.

While we enjoy the return of snowfall this winter, let's not lose sight of the bigger challenges we face. Please join our work to make Lake Tahoe's environment and communities more sustainable and prepared for the impacts of a changing climate. Together we can make a difference.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional

Opinion: U.S. should never host another Olympics

By Brian Alexander, Outside

After enough pleading and promises to make a desperate boyfriend seem hard to get, the International Olympic Committee thought it had the final list of candidates that would compete to host the 2024 Summer Olympics: Paris, Rome, Hamburg, Budapest, and—a last-minute substitute for Boston—Los Angeles. But then, late last year, Hamburg said no thanks, leaving four organizing committees in four cities who say they really, really want the Games. So now we wait. And wait.

In the meantime, there will be two years of politicking, schmoozing, and wining and dining. (The IOC promises there won't be any outright bribery this time, unlike with past Olympic beauty contests like Salt Lake City.) Then, two years from now, in September of 2017, IOC pooh-bahs will meet in Lima, Peru, and, to great fanfare, announce the lucky winner. There will be scenes of jubilation among the assembled campaign workers from the city that prevails.

The heartache of remorse will take a while to settle in.

Los Angeles mayor Eric Garcetti is absolutely sure there will be no heartache if L.A. ends up winning. He says he's thrilled about the idea of subbing for Boston, whose citizens wisely balked at the enormous financial uncertainty of hosting. In what must be some sort of record for speedy government action, a motion was introduced before the L.A. city council to

authorize Garcetti and council president Herb Wesson to negotiate with the IOC for 2024. Before Angelenos could react, the city was off to the Olympic races. Exactly how, or if, residents there will have a say about the idea remains murky, but here's hoping that, inspired by Boston's and Hamburg's good sense, Angelenos ultimately reject the Games, too. And while we're at it, let's forget about hosting the Olympics in the United States at all—not just in 2024, but forever.

Read the whole story

Letter: Questioning Liberty Utilities rate increase

Publisher's note: These comments were delivered to the CPUC last week in Kings Beach by North Shore resident Ellie Waller regarding the proposed Liberty Utilities rate hike and are republished with permission.

Many of you may not know that Liberty Utilities is owned by parent company Algonquin, a Canadian based Company. **Algonquin Power & Utilities Corp.** is a \$4.5 billion North American diversified generation, transmission and distribution utility.

Algonquin Power Income Fund was established in September 1997 and first listed its trust units on the Toronto Stock Exchange on Dec. 23, 1997. [1] Having raised nearly \$75 million, Algonquin used \$27.5 million to purchase 14 hydroelectric generation facilities located in Ontario, Québec, New York and New Hampshire.

From Liberty Utility webpage: The last time Liberty filed a general rate increase was in 2013 which resulted in an overall

4.97 percent increase in rates effective Jan. 1, 2013. This increase request is for 17.34 percent effective Jan. 1, 2016.

There is no specific information in Liberty Utilities (LU's) application about how much of the increase is for the 650 line upgrade. The public is being shut out of the details. Can you provide a breakdown? The 625 and 650 line upgrade project is seeking \$50 million for the entire upgrade project translating into base rate increase of about \$9 million per year with limited approval of Phase 1 at about \$18 million and the requirement of a new network study to set the trigger points for Phases 2 and 3 due to numerous deficiencies in the technical studies. The big cost of the upgrade project is still ahead and very little of this increase is the upgrade project portion of Phase 1. Phases 2 and 3 have not been done yet.

Whatever the number it is small compared to the other base rate items.

The money attributed to capital improvements should be detailed for the specific improvements and criteria provided for: depreciation, taxes, insurance, and other costs related to the system's capital improvements.

What is a fair capital cost? NV Energy just lowered rates in neighboring Reno by 5 percent.

Liberty Utilities (LU) has been aggressively raising rates since they purchased the system from Sierra Pacific Power in 2011. At the time of purchase, to get approval from the CPUC, LU insisted that its small size (lack of economy of scale compared to Sierra Pacific Power) would not cause rates to rise beyond what SPP would have done. The opposite has happened. The current increase of \$13 million-plus per year would boost the base rate to over \$50 million, not counting the cost of power which is just passed through to customers. The deception of the first increase in 2012 was due to LU

keeping the money from the lower cost of wholesale power, which made the net increase to the customer seem small. The reality was a 47 percent increase in their base rates. Now LU wants to add \$13 million to the \$38.5 million.

On website under social responsibility header: **Corporate Responsibility** is about increasing stakeholder value and financial performance. We are responsible to the communities where we operate, where we can create a more lasting, sustainable prosperity for all.

Our distribution business takes a local, responsive, and caring approach in every utility service territory. This continues to be a key differentiator and competitive advantage for the company. Our customers' issues are our issues—our frontline people live them every day.

All customer classes will get hit hard with the increases because these rate increases are much higher than the level of general inflation. LU is aggressively inflating rates, effectively doubling their base rates over five years from \$26 million to over \$50 million. How does this help support sustainability for the businesses in Lake Tahoe?

I'd like to better understand the difference between small, medium and large commercial. What category do ski resorts fall under versus a locally run restaurant?

LU has separated out vegetation expense from the cost per kwh. SPP had incorporated Vegetation into the kwh cost, and LU pulled them out. The CPUC approved an increase in Vegetation Management expense from about \$ 1 million to \$2.5 million per year beginning in 2012. This was to pay for deferred maintenance over three years and then be reduced. No reduction is being proposed, and LU appears to never lower rates for anything. The medium commercial rate is increased by 56 percent.

We received the Notice of Public Participation Hearing in our

recent bills there is a lack of specificity and general information for the public to comment on.

Criteria for what is included in the distribution infrastructure, customer service satisfaction, safety and reliability that is not part of what most of the public understands to be the CalPeco. Upgrade project must be provided to the public for transparency.

Provide us detailed criteria why Sierra Pacific included vegetation in kwh while Liberty submits as a separate cost. Also provide us info on what the Catastrophic Emergency Memorandum Account is, as well as the Solar Incentive Program as related to the Lake Tahoe residential and commercial ratepayers. And also provide detailed criteria for the 332 percent increase for irrigation

We have researched Liberty Utilities and increases like what is proposed is part of their corporate culture, i.e. to raise money in the stock market to buy projects and then exploit those projects to maximize their stockholders' returns. The rationale is ultimately what is good or necessary for their stockholders to maximize and secure their gains regardless of the consequences to the ratepayer. This rationale is made explicitly over nearly 100 pages of testimony by Dr. Morin justifying their request for a 10.5 percent. Return on equity. Their two most significant reasons for this were 1) the system is small and therefore demands a premium return, and 2) LU has a capital budget that calls for spending \$100 million over the next five years.

The point of this context is that LU appears to be using their monopoly license as a tool for generating profits at the expense of the relatively few (49,000) ratepayers.

When we were over 2 million customers with previous owners the smaller increases over many years was easier to swallow.

The PUC should not have approved the purchase of such a small

ratepayer base and I oppose this ridiculously high increase and request that the rate case be studied further before approved to identify the details and criteria other than ROE. A poor investment by a multi-billion dollar company should not be the responsibility of the ratepayers. We the little ratepayers do not owe the investors a 10.5 percent return.

I am also submitting a comment letter that was provided to the Office of ratepayer advocates in May 2015. Unfortunately the ORA is underfunded and understaffed to deal effectively with our very small Liberty Utilities cases like this one.