

Opinion: The truth about meal-kit freezer packs

By Kiera Butler, Mother Jones

People love to complain about the wastefulness of meal-kit delivery companies like Blue Apron and Hello Fresh. The baggies that hold a single scallion. The thousands of miles of shipping. The endless cardboard boxes. Those problems are annoying, but ultimately they're not environmental catastrophes: The baggies don't take up all that much landfill space, the cardboard boxes are recyclable, and it's not clear whether shipping meal kits is less efficient than transporting food to grocery stores and then to homes.

Blue Apron has a take-back program, but the company won't say whether it's actually reusing any of the freezer packs it's taking back—or simply storing them in a warehouse.

But there is a much better reason to criticize meal-kit companies—and as far as I can tell, few people are talking much about it. That's surprising, because it's actually the biggest (or heaviest, at least) thing in every meal-kit box: the freezer packs that keep the perishables fresh while they're being shipped. Blue Apron now sends out 8 million meals a month. If you figure that each box contains about three meals and two 6-pound ice packs, that's a staggering 192,000 tons of freezer-pack waste every year from Blue Apron alone.

To put that in perspective, that's the weight of nearly 100,000 cars or 2 million adult men. When I shared those numbers with Jack Macy, a senior coordinator for the San Francisco Department of the Environment's Commercial Zero Waste program, he could scarcely believe it. "That is an incredible waste," he said. The only reason he suspects he

hasn't heard about it yet from the city's trash haulers is that the freezer packs end up hidden in garbage bags.

Read the whole story

Opinion: EDC faces lawsuit over mitigation fees

By Larry Weitzman

A new and different challenge has been brought against El Dorado County's road financing plan, again for failure to follow the law. In this case the Mitigation Fee Act under which the county requires home builders, large, small and singular to pay what are called Traffic Impact Mitigation fees to the county for the issuance of a building permit.

The lawsuit, filed in El Dorado County Superior Court on June 5 demands a refund of the Traffic Impact Mitigation (TIM) fees paid by a homeowner who obtained a building permit to construct a 1,854-square foot house on Fort Jim Road, located in Zone 6 of El Dorado County's TIM Fee program. According to the complaint that was filed, George Sheetz, the plaintiff, claims that he was required to pay \$23,420 in TIM fees, \$2,260 for Highway 50 improvements and \$21,160 for local road improvements.



Larry Weitzman

Paragraph 10 of the complaint states, "The agency also must determine that both 'the fee's use' and 'the need for the public facility' are reasonably related to 'the type of development project on which the fee is imposed'." The complaint cited this requirement as part of the Mitigation Fee Act section 66001(a).

Paragraph 11 said, "To impose a development fee as the condition of approval for a specific development project, a local agency must determine how there is a reasonable relationship between the amount of the fee and the cost of the public facility or portion of the public facility attributable to the development on which the fee is imposed" pursuant to section 66001(b) of the Mitigation Fee Act.

The complaint in paragraph 21 claims that the "county did not make, nor has not ever made, an individual determination that the public impacts of Mr. Sheetz's manufactured house bears any relationship, let alone an essential nexus and rough proportionality, to the need for improvements to state and local roads. Nor can it. Mr. Sheetz's construction of one manufactured house on his property did not cause public impacts that justify imposition of the \$23,420 fee demanded by and paid to the county."

A plaintiff's right to protest the fee and sue for a refund is detailed in Section 66020, which was added to the MFA in 1990. This newer section provides that the county must give notice to the fee payer, in this case, plaintiff Sheetz that he has 90 days to protest the fee and 180 days to file suit for a refund. It appears that the county never gave the statutorily required notice. Plaintiff Sheetz filed a protest, notwithstanding, on Dec. 7, 2016, and the case was filed in the statutory 180-day time period provided by Section 66020.

Section 66020 of the Mitigation Fee Act in paragraph (d)(2)

provides that, "Any proceeding brought pursuant to this subdivision shall take precedence over all matters of the calendar except criminal, probate, eminent domain, forcible entry, and unlawful detainer proceedings." In other words, this matter should be litigated quickly because of the precedence provided by the statute.

A nonprofit group Friends of El Dorado County have joined in the action with Sheetz.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Opinion: LTUSD board celebrates student successes

By Troy Matthews and Barbara Bannar

It is that time of year again. It is time for the youth in our beautiful community to take the big plunge. We, the members of the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board of education, wish to congratulate each and every member of South Tahoe High School and Mount Tallac High School class of 2017 for all their hard work, not just for the last four years, but for the last 12. We are deeply proud of our seniors, and we hope that moving forward you never forget the closeness and care of a community like South Lake Tahoe.

If your path leads you to stay here at the lake, or pursue your dreams elsewhere, never forget your mountain roots. We wish you all the best and are cheering for your every success. As a unified school district, we are charged with full primary and secondary education for all our students; we also celebrate the tremendous accomplishments of our eighth grade

class, and welcome you to your next chapter at South Tahoe High.

There are so many exciting things happening at our schools. From the beautiful choral concerts at Tahoe Valley, to the two-way bilingual immersion program at Bijou School, to the nutritional growing domes and mountain academy at Sierra House, and the excellent outdoor education programming at Lake Tahoe Environmental Science Magnet. Both South Tahoe Middle School and South Tahoe High School were once again named AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) demonstration site schools, a major nationwide accomplishment. South Tahoe High School's athletes had a historic year. Performing arts is also thriving at the middle school and high school with amazing plays and concerts produced each year with tremendously gifted performers.

Recently, South Tahoe High School's photography students received statewide awards in the CTE California Streaming Photo awards, of which STHS students took two out three statewide awards, and CSU California Through My Eyes Photography awards, of which STHS students took four out of five statewide awards. Just an incredible accomplishment. Our community has so much to be proud of from all of our students.

The board wishes to extend a sincere welcome to the new STHS principal, Carline Sinkler. Sinkler comes to us from Herbert Hoover Middle School in San Francisco. There, she led over 85 staff members, collectively engaging and enriching the lives of 1,000 students from a variety of linguistic, economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The school is highly complex as it serves students in two language immersion programs, three performing arts programs, the first STEAM program in SFUSD, AVID Excel, and AVID.

Some of Sinkler's recent career highlights include ACSA Region 5's administrator of the year, San Francisco mayor's principal of the year, SFUSD innovation award (cultivating a culture of

creative confidence through design thinking), and SFUSD impact award (increasing outcomes for English language learners). We also wish to thank Chad Houck for his passionate dedication to our students, and wish him all the best in his new endeavor. He will be missed.

Though we as school board members love to celebrate the successes of our schools, we will not ignore our challenges as well. We are continually striving to increase student academic achievement at all of our schools, and we understand we have more work to do. The mental health and wellness of our students will always remain a top priority as we address the often harsh challenges and pressures facing our youth from external sources, including the media and online bullying. We will continue to provide every opportunity for educational success for every single student, regardless of familial income, language, and immigration status.

The probationary status of STHS's WASC accreditation took everyone by surprise; we understand and appreciate the concern of the community. In order to give this matter the full attention it deserves, we will dedicate an entire future article to the WASC process and the work that is currently being done to resolve the situation. The district also has a dedicated informational web page on the WASC renewal process at www.LTUSD.org/District. The site is interactive, and members of the community can submit questions. Stay tuned for regular written articles from the LTUSD school board on this and other matters.

We live in a breathtaking and caring community. We have incredible students, and parents, and teachers. We are honored to serve you as members of the school board. Everyone is welcome at regular open school board meetings, typically held the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month at the LTUSD education center at 1021 Al Tahoe Blvd. at 6pmm. Come by and say "hi," and let us know what is on your mind during public comment. We wish everyone a safe and fun summer.

Troy Matthews and Barbara Bannar are on the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board of education.

Letter: Taxpayers group against senior cuts

Publisher's note: This letter was sent to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors on June 7, 2017.

The Taxpayers Association of El Dorado County requests that funding for Senior Legal Services not be removed from the budget.

The Taxpayers Association recognizes the difficult position the BOS is in as it attempts to allocate limited resources to a large list of services and programs. However, Senior Legal Services has provided direct assistance to a large number of seniors at a very modest cost. In addition Senior Legal Services has provided, again at a relatively low cost, negotiated and /or civil remedies to problems that could very well have impacted workloads in other departments that deal with elder issues.

We believe it would be fiscally prudent to maintain Senior Legal Services.

Respectfully,

Bill Carey, vice president El Dorado County Taxpayers Association

Opinion: Why are EDC seniors being singled out?

By Larry Weitzman

El Dorado County has one of the highest per capita percentage of seniors in California. So, it is understandable that the county has had a longstanding senior legal program and a very successful one at that; handling a multitude of problems and protecting seniors from being preyed upon, seeing 2,000 clients a year.

It costs the county about \$250,000 a year, which is supplemented by about \$95,000 in private donations and a \$50,000 federal grant. It's a miniscule portion of the county General Fund budget of about \$280 million.



Larry Weitzman

Senior legal is about to come crashing down. The new county budget is canceling the program and laying off a staff of 3.5 employees, including a part-time lawyer, a full-time lawyer, plus a paralegal and a secretary. Out of 1,861 county employees, the only layoffs are to senior legal. Why is there a war on seniors? My supervisor, Mike Ranalli, would not give me a straight answer about protecting senior legal. Is Ranalli AWOL in this war?

Senior legal was informed of the pending layoffs on about May 18, a few days before the senior member of the staff was going out of the country for three weeks. More appalling is the plight of the new full-time senior legal attorney who left her career at a law firm to become the new full-time attorney at senior legal who started on May 1, just 18 days prior. According to the proposed budget, she will be getting a pink slip no later than Aug. 4. Effectively this new attorney was fired before she was hired as staff had to know prior to May 1 that senior legal was being cut from the budget as county budgets, ours included, take months to prepare. Shameful and cruel.

As to losing senior, the proposed budget at page 281 said: "The CAO office believes that there are alternatives to providing legal aid to vulnerable populations, and these alternatives should be explored and promoted." What are the alternatives and what do seniors do while the CAO is off exploring. Try Timbuktu.

EL Dorado County is claiming it is due to budget cuts. They say departments are taking large cuts, but the reality is the only people who work for the county who are losing their jobs are the 3.5 people at senior legal. No other current county employee is being laid off, which means that 1,858 people will remain on the county payroll.

Something else is going on here and it is sinister. The newly hired public information officer, Carla Hass, has attempted to obfuscate the truth in a press release last week which actually confirmed the sinister nature of this hatchet job taking place against these four dedicated senior legal employees. Worse yet, against the seniors of El Dorado County. Why has the CAO moved heaven and earth so no other county employees will be laid off other than senior legal? Remember, the CAO works at the direction of the board.

Former mayor of Placerville and current chair of Friends of

Seniors, Kathi Lishman, which helps with senior legal donations, among other things said, "The Board of Supervisors cannot make these cuts in a vacuum." Well Lishman, they just did, at least in the proposed budget. There are no real cuts in spending on employees except for senior legal.

Lishman went on to say, "I am shocked to hear about senior legal, as it seems to have come out of nowhere, and is quite alarming. The services they provide to EDC seniors are extremely important. Senior legal has received about \$95,000 in donations from the community in the past 12 months, and meets with about 2,000 clients a year. Some of the elderly are home bound or institutionalized.

"They also provide legal resources for adult protective services. The programs that provide direct service to clients are the first ones to have their budgets reduced or cut, while overhead costs to these programs continually go up, often due to increased administrative costs."

Former El Dorado County Community Services/Human Services Director for 25 years (1982-2007), John Litwinovich, had the following to say of the proposed senior services cuts: "At this point, I think adding administrative positions is a mistake. The costly creation of agency level administrative positions is the principal reason senior services are in jeopardy. Now is not the time to be dismantling the needed senior continuum of care prior boards developed over decades. Rather, it's time to reconsider administrative layers and positions that have been added in recent years, positions that have drawn resources away from services ...

"Priority should be given to those county employees who directly serve the public, be they sheriff's deputies, road maintenance workers, front desk clerks, kitchen staff who prepare meals for homebound seniors, or Senior Legal attorneys, on whom so many vulnerable elders depend. These and other direct service positions, rather than an ample

administrative structure, constitute county.”

Now to the details. Recently, the newly hired county PIO, Hass, aka Doctor Spin, who costs the county 60 percent of the current entire county senior legal budget, wrote a press release to counteract a column that was published on this subject. My column said, “there are no position cuts to county administration.”

Doctor Spin, employed by the county with your tax dollars, said the following with full CAO approval: “Correction: The recommended budget includes a net county cost reduction of approximately 8.2 percent within the general government functional group, which is primarily county administration. In addition, many high level administrative positions in the Community Development Agency, including the CDA director, assistant director of finance and administration, administrative secretary, administrative services officer and senior department analyst, have been cut from the budget, with all of the work being absorbed by other staff. The Chief Administrative Office is absorbing most of this work without any increases to net county cost.”

Here are how spin doctors, this one included, mislead. Budgeted cuts are not spending cuts. It’s like keeping two sets of books. The facts, which are straight from the county’s proposed budget, while it sounds like there will be other layoffs, no actual currently employed county employees are losing their jobs and/or paychecks and pensions as are the staff in senior legal.

So as to the rest of 1,858 full time equivalent positions (FTEs), not one layoff or other termination other than the 3.5 county employees who work at senior legal. Not one, zero, zip, nada. Well, how could that be, when they brag about an 8.2 percent cut intimating that there will be layoffs in the CDA and/or administration?

Here's how. The county budgets for unfilled positions (vacancies) and filled positions whether they are paying a salary for that position or not. The county in the past has carried about 8 percent vacant positions. EDC in the past has always effectively overbudgeted by including vacancies. That's the budget set of books. When departments don't spend their budgeted amount, it looks like they are saving money, which looks good to the public. It's easy to do when you overbudget. It's like having two sets of books. As the IRS knows, only dishonest people have and keep two sets of books.

How the CAO cut the budget is by eliminating unfilled (vacant) positions. While those are technically budget cuts, they are not spending cuts. In fact, spending is going up by several percentage points. The only actual cut in the budget with respect to the county's entire staff is senior legal. A reminder to the readers, the county (we taxpayers) pay about \$150,000 a year to be effectively lied to. Carla Hass didn't tell you the real truth, but covered it up with bureaucratic budgeting government obfuscation. This is a perfect example of the Mark Twain adage, "Figures don't lie, but liars figure."

And if there were an 8.2 percent real spending cut in administration, then we could understand an 8.2 percent cut in senior legal, but the reality is there is no spending cut in administration and a 100 percent spending cut to Senior Legal.

I don't know yet who is behind this evil Machiavellian machination, but these firings are not about saving the taxpayer money. There is something else going on and I intend to get to the bottom of it.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Voices: STMS students dish food at B&B

To the community,

In addition to leadership events, club meetings, and recreation trips, the Club Live program at the South Tahoe Middle School promotes service to others and on May 22, Club Live sponsored a Bread & Broth Adopt A Day of Nourishment.

At the Monday meal program leaders Larry and Paula Lambdin and club members Mylee Blanchard, Destiny Hursh and Elisa Roberts provided incredible service to the guests who came to Grace Hall for a tasty and filling evening meal.

Arriving at 3pm, the Club Live sponsor crew put on B&B aprons and set to work bagging food for the giveaway bags and helping the B&B volunteers with whatever was needed to make the dinner service go smoothly. While taking a break, Blanchard and Roberts shared their thoughts about volunteering at a B&B dinner. They both "liked the experience and helping all the people in need." Roberts also thought that "food was good!"

By helping feed the evening's 118 dinner guests and making them feel welcome and valued, these young Club Live members made a difference in many folk's lives and probably their own. Bread & Broth would like to thank Club Live for the valuable service they are providing for the youth in our community and for providing an outstanding sponsor crew at their sponsorship dinner.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: What's the solution to unaffordable housing?

By Edward Joseph Pierini Jr., Sacramento Bee

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development classifies a Sacramento family of four with annual earnings of \$59,350 as low income; for a single person, it's \$41,550. HUD's low-income classification sounds about right because, with this income, many can't afford Sacramento County's median home sales price of \$312,000 or an average of \$1,450 per month to rent a two-bedroom dwelling.

Fortunately, we have taxpayer-financed and government-subsidized affordable housing programs. What are some of these programs' recent accomplishments?

A 2017 Cabinet Exit Memo to the American People by the outgoing HUD secretary highlighted achievements during former President Barack Obama's administration, including many "pat on the back" laudatory statements. Statistical information about recent affordable housing accomplishments was difficult to find. Should we expect more from a government agency with a modest \$49.3 billion annual budget?

[Read the whole story](#)

Editorial: More pension rate

hikes needed at CalPERS

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the May 22, 2017, San Jose Mercury News.*

There's more bad news to come from CalPERS, the nation's largest pension plan.

In December, the board of the California Public Employees' Retirement System approved phase-in of a rate increase for the state and local government agencies that provide most of its funding.

But it won't be enough to shore up the ailing system. That's why next month the board will begin a review process that's likely to lead to approval as early as December of another increase.

Read the whole story

Opinion: EDC CAO didn't tell the whole truth

By Larry Weitzman

El Dorado County's relatively new CAO, Don Ashton, tries to make a case for new and higher taxes. In his bottom line last paragraph of his June 6 column in *Lake Tahoe News* he says: "Here's the bottom line: we have no control over state mandates that are underfunded; we have no control over CalPERS; we have some control over property and sales taxes, but will have to make adjustments in them to maintain service levels. Budgeting. Simple, but not easy."



Larry Weitzman

The county has control over the biggest part (70 percent) of the General Fund budget. It's called salary and benefits, which have grown from a constant from the years 2010 to 2013 when salary and benefits averaged about \$118 million to a proposed 2017-18 budget of more than \$170 million; a 44 percent increase in four years and yet services have not changed.

Much of that increase is due to the infamous CAO Teri Daly 15 percent raise of about two years ago. A less but still significant reason is the increase in the EDC workforce of about 8 percent. Yet services remain constant.

Former Supervisor Norma Santiago applauded Daly even as she was terminated as being a champion of the employees. She sure was. But Daly (and Santiago, she voted for the raise) was the enemy of the residents of El Dorado County. Over the five years including the new budget, salary and benefits raises have cost EDC residents more than \$100 million. The administration portion of our county needs to go on a diet.

I could cite specific examples of high paid employee incompetence, employees who make over \$200,000 a year, but I won't bore you with additional, lengthy details. Taxes don't have to go up, salaries are too high, especially for what we get. We need to elect people who will excise this cancer that appears to be slowly killing the patient.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Opinion: What Calif. has is a housing catastrophe

By Erika D. Smith, Sacramento Bee

We do a lot of talking about the housing crisis in this state. But I'm beginning to think the word "crisis" isn't strong enough to convey just how alarmed every Californian should be that the cost of meeting a basic necessity of life – you know, shelter – is devouring entire communities with no signs of slowing down.

Seriously, just check out the data from the latest parade of housing reports.

According to the California Association of Realtors, only 32 percent of households statewide can now afford to buy the median-priced, \$496,620 home. In Sacramento County, one of the fastest growing markets in the Golden State, a mere 46 percent of households can afford a home for the median \$319,720.

Read the whole story