South Tahoe to mandate property owners plow sidewalks

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe's sidewalks – the few that are in the city – are about to be cleared of snow.

This is assuming the City Council OKs the idea Dec. 14. And assuming property owners give a hoot because they sure haven't seemed to care without the threat of being fined.

"The goal through this ordinance is to give us the authority to cite people," City Attorney Patrick Enright told the council this month.

Property owners will have to plow sidewalks in South Lake Tahoe starting in 2011. Photos/Kathryn Reed

The current council heard the first reading of the ordinance earlier this month and approved it on a 3-1 vote. Councilman

Bruce Grego was absent and Councilman Bill Crawford abstained.

The new council that will be sworn in Dec. 14 will be asked to make the final approval.

The maintenance part of the ordinance reads, “It shall be the duty of all owners, and their tenants, of real property within the city whose property borders, or is in an easement, any improved sidewalk or walkway to maintain the sidewalk or walkway in a safe condition for its use by pedestrians and other members of the public. The duty created by the ordinance shall include the duty to keep the sidewalk or walkway free and clear of all dirt, sand, gravel, filth, rubbish, ice and snow.”

Staff recognizes people cannot be shoveling around the clock, but it will have to be done when needed.

Linda Borge, who is co-owner of the property on Highway 50 where Ken’s Tires is, said Caltrans piles snow in front of the store. With the store being closed from noon Saturday to Monday morning, she said no one would be there to clear the snow from the sidewalk.

John Runnels is all for clearing sidewalks, but wanted the city to create a panel to discuss the issue because there has been no outreach to the business community.

Enforcement will be complaint driven. It will be considered a nuisance if the property owner has not cleared the sideway. The city could clear it and charge the property owner the fee to do so or put a lien on the property if necessary.

The earliest the policy will take affect is January. Enright told the council this winter warnings would primarily be issued and that the city plans to do outreach to the public and chambers of commerce.

“It’s what state law requires. It’s putting people on notice,”

City Manager Tony O'Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News* of the proposal to tweak City Code Chapter 26 to have city law conform to state law.

O'Rourke realizes this means the city is going to have to come through with better maintenance of areas it is responsible for.

Currently Caltrans is liable for the sidewalks along the highway. However, as improvements are made in the coming years, the liability transfers to the city.

Next building season Caltrans is expected to start its multi-year project to improve the Ski Run to Trout Creek area along Highway 50. This includes installation of sidewalks, curbs and gutters.

Now Caltrans is proposing doing the same from Trout Creek to the Y. This will be before the council to approve soon, according to Public Works Director John Greenhut.

"This is maybe the beginning of a whole series of self-improvements. If we don't take care of ourselves, why would others want to be part of it as residents or guests?" O'Rourke asked. "We need to take care of our own house, to make it safe, to make it reliable."

Like other things that have gone on in South Lake Tahoe for years that make him scratch his head, O'Rourke hasn't uncovered a reason as to why the clearing of sidewalks has not been enforced.

The storm that started last weekend had him baffled as he watched traffic on Highway 50 reduced to one lane while someone walked in the street because that was the pedestrian's only choice.

"And people in wheelchairs. I don't know how they survive. There is either a lack of sidewalks or the sidewalks are

crumbling or not being maintained," O'Rourke said. "This is not inviting for the community or tourists. Being a tourist based economy it has struck me that the first impression is not a good one."

Although what he is pointing out is not news to anyone who has lived in South Tahoe or visited the area, what is news is someone is doing something about it.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)