

South Lake Tahoe passes sign ordinance on 3-2 vote

By Kathryn Reed

Unable to compromise, Tom Davis and Bruce Grego voted against the latest version of South Lake Tahoe's sign ordinance.

Still, it passed with a 3-2 vote. This was the first reading, with the second likely to be at the Oct. 18 meeting. Then it becomes the law 30 days later.



Tom Davis wants a broad sign ordinance - - a change from seven years ago. Photo/LTN

One of Davis' issues is wanting any color of decorative lights, not just white or blue as had been proposed. To this, his colleagues agreed.

What the majority would not agree to were allowing sandwich board signs to be used anytime and for the council to hear appeals instead of planning commissioners. Those were sticking points for Davis and Grego.

Davis hasn't always had this free spirit about signs.

In April 2004 when he was on the City Council he said, "I'm trying to strike a balance, but we don't want it to look like little Tijuana."

On Oct. 4 he said, "I believe in free enterprise all the way. I want to give businesses as many advantages as possible."

While much of the discussion this year during the laborious sign discussions has been about how difficult the economy is now and that businesses should be allowed to do what they can to attract customers, this same argument has been made for years.

In April 2004 when the economy was humming on the South Shore, Hal Cole made that same desperate argument. At a meeting seven plus years ago he said, "I want to visually upgrade our corridor. But on the other hand, I know how tough proprietors have it to make a living in this town."

With the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency having sign regulations on the books since 1998, the city and five counties in the basin must abide by it or create stricter rules. South Tahoe has been going back and forth, with each council coming up with its own version and enforcement never existing.

While staff says enforcement is coming – that's always been said.

This is not the first time Grego has been on his soapbox about the council needing to have the last word. Councilwomen Claire Fortier and Angela Swanson along with Cole said the planning commissioners are more than capable of ruling on whether a business is complying with the sign ordinance.

Grego tried to do a bit of horse-trading with his colleagues to get what he wanted, but the three stuck by their convictions. Grego said he really wanted a 5-0 vote. The majority said they were good with the motion as presented that

eventually passed.

In other action:

- Grego asked for an item to be put on a future agenda to discuss taxing Heavenly Mountain Resort. Cole said he'd agree to a broader discussion about the cost analysis of having Heavenly and other businesses pay for their share of fire costs and wear-and-tear to roads. Eventually, it was decided to have the Fiscal Sustainability Committee, which has yet to be tasked with any homework, to look into the issue. This group next meets in three weeks.