

TRPA inching toward a workable Regional Plan

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – More time was spent discussing who should be on the Regional Plan Update Committee than where the plan is.

Considering the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's document dictates what the five counties and one city, along with other landowners can do in the Lake Tahoe Basin and the fact the document was due in 2007, the sense of priorities seemed skewed at Wednesday's meeting.

What was resolved after everyone seemed to have his or her turn to talk (Governing Board member Nancy McDermid was absent) is the committee would grow by one. South Lake Tahoe's rep Claire Fortier is now on the Regional Plan Update Committee.



Arlo Stockham on Oct. 26 gives the TRPA Governing Board an update on the Regional Plan. Photo/Kathryn Reed

While the staff report listed when the twice monthly committee meetings will be, committee Chairman Clem Shute made it clear they are likely to change so to not put them down in ink. The meetings will be on TRPA's website and they are open to the public. The next one is Nov. 2 when the committee will likely take action on what staff brought to the board Wednesday – which was for discussion purposes only.

Arlo Stockham, who was brought in last month to breath life into the Regional Plan Update that everyone says will be ready for a vote in December 2012, went over the basics of where things are.

“We need to get out of detailed design issues. We need to spend our limited resources on environmental gain,” Stockham said.

Board member Byron Sher called the removal of all reference to transect zoning “a bombshell”. His colleague Tim Cashman was a bit miffed as well, saying, “I’m a fan of transect.”

To this Stockham said, “It’s a term no one understands. We don’t plan to mandate transect.”

Jennifer Merchant, who works in Placer County’s Tahoe office, voiced her frustration with transect going away because she said her staff has jumped through hoops to accommodate TRPA for years, with about \$700,000 spent on developing a plan and transect is the path they were told to pursue.

Shute is concerned about the county going through the process without a Regional Plan Update. Stockham said it would not be a problem.

It turned out to be a big problem for South Lake Tahoe. The League to Save Lake Tahoe is suing the city because its General Plan does not conform to the current TRPA Regional Plan.

Although the word transect is out, it isn't gone in theory. The plan is to promote smart growth, mixed use vibrant centers. Essentially it's transect without calling it that. It also allows for more flexibility.

Flexible – that's the word TRPA is trying to embrace and be associated with.

The talk is local jurisdictions will have a greater say in what is built or rebuilt in their communities. Of course, it still must fit into whatever big picture the Governing Board approves so it won't ever be a free for all.

Local plans would be adopted to conform to the TPRA Regional Plan.

While the goals are to remove redundancy, increase delegation to local government and create one-stop shops, the details are far from in place. Enforcement is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Already on the books are more than 175 descriptions of land use for each plan area. Ideally, much of that will go away.

Land use classifications will go from five to seven, with wilderness and backcountry being added. Commercial/public service will be called mixed-use. The other existing categories are conservation, recreation, residential and tourist.

While everyone seems to have a hand in the Regional Plan Update, simultaneously the environmental documents are being prepared. The goal is the draft EIS will be out in March.

Executive Director Joanne Marchetta said it is possible to study the five alternatives while the update is under way because it's been set up to look at the "broadest range of possibilities so we analyze the full range of impacts."

Also on Wednesday was a workshop with the Governing Board and

Advisory Planning Commission to go over the Code of Ordinances. It will be before the Governing Board for adoption in November.

The goal is to make it less cumbersome – so someone might understand it without hiring an attorney. With people understanding what to do, it might mean the consulting business in the basin will be less robust.

But it is not designed to eliminate the need for each property to have a \$1,000 site analysis done to document coverage and other TRPA-isms. It's the requirement of those types of regulations that make deck extensions so expensive and why there are so many illegal ones.

Then there are board members like Sher, who has never lived in the basin, who wants to force homeowners to do their BMPs before they can sell their property. That is a possibility in one of the alternatives being studied.

In other action:

- The board accepted the \$35,000 settlement agreement with Tamara Fritz who extended her West Shore pier without a permit and installed a boat lift on the property. She will also have to clean up the vacant lot next door.
- The board resumes its meeting Thursday at 9:30am at Stateline, with the South Tahoe Greenway bike trail on the agenda along with tourist accommodation units at the Nugget.