Tahoe officials not worried about West Slope housing boom

By Kathryn Reed

No one knows what the economic impact to all of El Dorado County would be if 7,000 houses are built on the West Slope.

But more people would definitely further clog Highway 50, the main artery to the South Shore. Traffic is regularly choked getting out of South Lake Tahoe through Meyers on Sundays and bottlenecks again in Placerville with the traffic lights. The reverse happens on Fridays.

Tahoe tourism advocates for the past few years have tried to urge people to travel at non-peak times to help avoid the congestion and lessen the time it takes them to get to and from Tahoe. At the same they have urged hotels and restaurants and others to entice people to come earlier and stay later.

"Perhaps this presents a viable opportunity to contemplate public transit from outside the basin," Carol Chaplin, executive director of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The county could have helped the highway situation, but opted earlier to allocate Highway 50 funds to other areas.

Mike Applegarth with the County Administrator's Office said the county has no tool to study the economic impacts of the housing because there are so many variables.

He told *Lake Tahoe News* that it is doubtful property taxes would cover all of the services impacted by the new development.

"But with homes comes commercial development. There is not a lot of development left on the West Slope. I think we have

1,500 acres of remaining commercial left," Applegarth said. "Whether retail establishments generate a lot of sales taxes, it's hard to say."

Property tax revenue would definitely increase, especially with the new housing to be assessed at a higher rate than most of the older properties on the market.

But there is also the toll that can be taken on roads, schools, fire districts, sheriff's office, and other infrastructure and county departments.

The county's 2014 General Plan allows for 21,000 more houses. The General Plan for the most part covers areas outside of the Lake Tahoe Basin. The basin is covered by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Regional Plan and community or area plans for specific sections.

"These projects sound like they will create quite a bit of a fight between growth, smart-growth and rural advocates, putting pressure on the El Dorado County supervisors to balance these competing interests. The arguments for and against are the same arguments that have been waged in most locations throughout the west for many years," Nancy Kerry, South Lake Tahoe city manager, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She doesn't see the housing alone negatively impacting the South Shore, but added that if jobs that pay well are part of the equation, then an impact would likely be inevitable.

El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago, who represents Tahoe, was not available for comment.

"From a tourism standpoint, it won't drive much in the way of room nights as the West Slope would be a day trip market for the most part," Chaplin said. "With that said, it could benefit our recreation providers and generate sales tax through purchase of activities, retail and restaurant food-beverage."

While the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce is supposed to represent a different constituency than LTVA, chamber CEO B Gorman said, “I think (Chaplin) covered all that I would have said.”

Then there is also the matter of 10,000 houses that are slated to go in next door in Folsom – which is in Sacramento County.