Snow removal fee in South Tahoe may increase

By Kathryn Reed

It will be up to voters if snow removal fees double in South Lake Tahoe.

The City Council on Sept. 17 unanimously agreed to have staff draw up a ballot initiative for 2014 that would increase the fee from $20 to $40.

“The equipment is desperately in need of upgrades,” City Attorney Tom Watson told the council.

The average age of the fleet is 19, with the oldest piece of equipment being a 43-year-old blower.

South Tahoe voters will be asked in 2014 to tax themselves to replace snow removal equipment. Photo/LTN file

The proposal brought forward Tuesday was for the additional fee to cover equipment, maintenance and operations.

“The spirit of the original ordinance was to fund equipment,” Councilman Hal Cole said. “I’d rather see a ballot measure for equipment and maintenance than operations."

His colleagues all agreed – they don't want the tax to go for operations.

"It's $20 a year. I can't believe many people in the community wouldn't see the need for it," Councilwoman JoAnn Conner said. "This is a simple thing. We need better equipment."

In saying this, she was also against forming a subcommittee at this early stage to deal with public outreach.

Councilwoman Brooke Laine pointed out if it were such a simple thing, then the 2005 ballot initiative would have passed.

That year the proposed increase failed with 54.3 percent of the voters against it. Like all tax initiatives, it will take two-thirds of the voters for it to pass. That increase would have made the original 1989 assessment $40 per year per parcel in the city limits.

The 2014 proposal is a separate $20 tax that would likely increase based on inflation. For that to happen, it needs to be written into the ballot measure. It would leave the current $20 assessment in place.

"… while today's capital costs are covered by the 1989 assessment, there are no available resources for capital reserve for equipment replacement," Watson wrote in his staff report. "Without additional revenue, future capital purchases will have to be funded out of reserves, new debt or the general fund."

If passed, the measure would bring in about $440,000 a year from the nearly 11,000 parcels that would be paying $40/year.