

Letter: Tahoe airport needs to be accountable to all

To the community,

I was pleasantly surprised at the turnout for the city's first workshop on updating the airport master plan last week on Feb. 13 at City Hall. I want to thank city officials for holding it. There was a large crowd present who came to the meeting with different views and perspectives about the airport. Several people voiced support for it, while others want it to be closed. Some people were there just to listen and find out more.

We were told that the city's existing airport master plan expired in 2012 so the Federal Aviation Administration gave the city a 90 percent grant to pay for the \$350,000 consultant study that is expected to take one year to complete. More public meetings will be held during the study period.

The South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors supports a viable airport and the board asked me to participate in the update process and keep them advised. I am also one who supports having a viable airport in town because I believe that it can be an alternative travel option for visitors to using their auto. I support commercial service as long as the planes are state-of-the-art technologies, noise standards are enforced, and the people of South Lake Tahoe do not have to subsidize commercial flights as they did in the past. The airport is a public safety resource in times of emergency as was demonstrated during the Angora Fire. The airport is one of a few locations in town where non-aviation lands can be used to grow environmentally friendly businesses and grow and diversify the local economy, something we desperately need if we are going to have more than minimum wage jobs. Finally, a viable airport may attract ecologically

mindful business men and women to live and work in South Tahoe who want easy access to other regions to do offsite work and can conduct business here via the Internet.

However, I recognize that a few community members want the airport closed down and the land restored to a natural condition, and they want to know the cost to close the airport. They point out that the airport built in 1959 took away valuable environmental lands. Some people want to know the specific benefit the airport provides to residents and businesses in South Lake Tahoe? To these requests, the consultant doing the study stated that master planning process did not cover the cost to answer these questions.

Although I am an airport supporter, a way must be found to answer the questions about the cost of airport closure, the impact of airport closure (good and bad), and the specific benefits South Lake Tahoe residents derive or can derive from it. In addition, I think the study needs to be examining how the airport master plan implementation can be coupled with needed environmental improvements in the community just as city government officials did a few years ago when the airport runways were rebuilt but narrowed and improvements were made to the Upper Truckee River adjacent to the runways to reduce sedimentation discharge into the Lake.

We need continued civic engagement on the airport master plan, involvement by supporters and critics, and answers to questions being posed by the public. I believe that we can find common ground between supporters and critics by the participation of all concerned parties and clear and concise answers to questions posed by the public.

Thank you for your assistance in regard to this matter.

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