

Douglas inches toward revamping Stateline



The event venue on this South Shore Vision Plan rendering, in blue on the right, is being studied. Rendering/Design Workshop

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – A 6,000- to 7,500-seat indoor-outdoor event center on the South Shore is gaining traction.

The South Tahoe Alliance of Resorts has put up \$100,000 for feasibility and blight studies for the project. The blight study is because it would be considered a redevelopment project. Within the next few months a decision is likely as to whether this is something worth pursuing.

“It needs to be walkable to Stateline from California,” Mike Bradford, with STAR, told *Lake Tahoe News*. That is one of the

preliminary findings.

This has a lot to do with if the venue were to be used as a convention center-meeting place, because California agencies must rent rooms in the state even if they convene elsewhere.

That is why the original Chateau project in South Lake Tahoe was going to have a convention center – to attract the business-tourist market.

In the South Shore Vision Plan that was created in 2011, and funded by STAR, it calls for such an event center to be built behind what is now Lake Tahoe Hard Rock. But a plot of land behind MontBleu is now also under consideration.

Originally, it was to be completely an indoor facility, but that thinking has changed. It could be more similar to what those on the North Shore envision to be built at Northstar.

Bradford said Harrah's-Harveys is on board with the idea, knowing the outdoor concert series at Harveys' parking lot would move to the new venue. A bit of irony is Harrah's at one time was going to be the driving force behind the convention center project in South Lake Tahoe, but declined to do so.

The new facility could possibly generate more than \$20 million in annual revenue. More exact numbers will come from the feasibility study. Who would own and operate it are other factors to be worked out.

If things pencil out, then STAR will take its findings to the Douglas County commissioners.



Support for the loop road and better connectivity was voiced Feb. 19 at the Douglas County Commission meeting. Rendering/Design Workshop

On Feb. 19 this events center was alluded to more than once as commissioners received updates on the Countywide Connectivity Transportation System, and Recreation and Tourism Plan.

All 13 speakers want the commissioners to go forward with the connectivity plan – namely the loop road that ties Douglas County and South Lake Tahoe in the casino area – and the greater South Shore Vision Plan. And while the electeds support the idea, they question whether the broader community will support the plan when it comes to funding.

Commissioner Greg Lyon expects a “hurricane” of backlash to come from the valley. That is because raising taxes is how it will likely be paid.

Douglas County has the Nevada Legislature's permission to implement a 2.5 percent utility operator fee that would raise \$2 million, a 5-cent fuel tax to generate \$900,000 and a 25-cent sales tax to raise \$1.5 million. The money would benefit the lake and valley.

County officials say that nearly \$5 million could become \$50 million after bonding and then it could be used as a 25 percent match. (Gone are the days where state and federal dollars come without the need for local dollars.) This was then broken down to be \$4.84 per month per resident (not household), with one-third of the money coming from tourists.

Commissioners took no action Thursday.

Staff, though, envisions one of the top priorities being the loop road. Every Stateline casino is behind it based on testimony Feb. 19, as are Edgewood Companies, Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel and Heavenly Mountain Resort.

Other priorities are: Highway 395 Main Street revitalization, an alternate truck route, Ranchos connectivity path, and airport multi-modal regional transit. The county would need \$22 million, with the remainder from other sources, according to staff.

The event center also ties into the recreation plan as a venue.



Kahle Community Park is a

money generating facility at Stateline.

Douglas County used the same consulting firm – MIG out of Oregon – as South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County did for their recreation master plan. They were done at the same time in order to look at the greater needs of the entire South Shore.

Cindy Mendoza with MIG gave a presentation to the commissioners on Thursday, saying the No. 1 key project is the event center.

Signage is another important thing to let people know where recreation facilities are and then to explain to people where they could get to on a particular trail and what the mileage is.

While Kahle Community Center's long-term plan was to have an aquatic center, Mendoza said with South Lake Tahoe looking at a leisure type swimming pool at its rec center then Douglas County might instead consider expanding its gym.

The goal is to have the recreation facilities on both sides of the state line be for everyone on the South Shore, and then be used in a coordinated manner to attract athletic events.

Scott Morgan, who heads the recreation department for Douglas, would not say if the vacant Kingsbury Middle School might still be an option for the county when it comes to expanding facilities. That Stateline site has sat vacant for years with not one person or entity putting in an offer to buy it.

Indoor tennis courts at Zephyr Cove Park are still on the books. Morgan told *Lake Tahoe News* the new library director does not oppose such a scenario, but added that it would not happen anytime soon. The library last year allowed the Zephyr Cove Tennis Club Foundation to transform part of the building, which sits next to the courts, into a pro shop.