Grassroots effort under way to change SLT

By Kathryn Reed

Creating a voice for the 80 percent in the middle, not the fringe on either side. That was the impetus to bring together a group of about 50 people on Tuesday. The discussion was all about how to make South Lake Tahoe better.

While Jamie and David Orr of Tahoe Mountain Lab facilitated the meeting, they didn't take ownership of it per se. Their goal was to get people to discuss issues in a positive way that leads to action. It's not that the group as a whole will do something – or it might. Talking about change and how to make it happen was the bulk of the discussion.

"This meeting is to build trust in the community," David Orr said to the packed group at the American Legion on March 23.

Building trust started with listening and sharing.

It was a diverse group who came out, with most admitting they met new people that night, and learned a thing or two.

Jamie Orr, standing, listens as people discuss what they want for the future of the South Shore community. Photo/LTN

Everyone was asked to name one local issue they care about. The answers included: education, poverty, economic development/sustainability, recreation, affordable housing, divisiveness in the community, environment, strong community, homeless veterans, broadband Internet, pet welfare, climate change, clean energy, children, blight, the number of voters – or lack thereof, bear boxes, natural resources, higher

education, and health care.

Seven smaller groups were formed – with the goal of people splitting up from friends – and they were to address two questions:

· How can I as a person make an impact on the community?

· How can this group make an impact on the community?

It was a collegial gathering, with some people leaving eager and inspired to bring about the change they envision, while others looked at things a bit more skeptically.

City Councilman Austin Sass told his group and the larger one it's great people want the council to do X, Y and Z, but at most he receives three emails a week from people about an issue. So, while people might want change, they aren't talking to the people who can help make it happen.

At the end of the night individually people were asked to either talk about what they heard that they like that was not their idea/concern or what they will commit to do going forward.

Answers included: people in El Dorado County want better ways to impact city issues, getting people to vote, create a publication for new residents, paying more attention, finding two people to run for City Council, getting friends involved, helping groups to collaborate – building trust and bridges, accountability, communication, political action, reach out to the City Council, and get Latinos involved.

The consensus was to meet again. Next time it will be a different organizer.

"It's time to get to work," Jamie Orr said as the meeting ended.