

Opinion: August times in Lake Tahoe

By Garry Bowen

The title today is to introduce a bit of a word game, but timed to coincide with several Tahoe items, not to mention the beginning of our calendar's eighth month, August. The word august is not used as much as it once was, meaning as it does: respected, impressive, or inspiring reverence or admiration.

Therefore, the word offers both a time line, along with some timely admonitions, to introduce yet another acronym into Tahoe's life, that of AFP, standing for "activities feigning progress."



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When this writer worked with media for the last two Amgen events here, the slogan they used both times for their race T-shirts was If You See Something, Say Something. So the use of admonitions can be thought of as following-through on that, for both future and local reasons.

Recently, there were side-by-side columns by Steve Teshara and Carl Ribaud, both of which offered stark AFP reminders: Teshara announcing a chamber endorsement of the proposed one-half percent sales tax increase, purportedly to create a designated fund to fix our roads and potholes, while Ribaud opined on our tourism status, at the same time serving notice

on the “broader direction of sustainability, which involves, at least on the local level, the need to think beyond separating trash, doing away with plastic bags, and reusing hotel towels (used) for more than a day.” His is a correct implication, as there is indeed way more to sustainability than that, as inferred by TERC’s current state-of-the-lake conclusion that Tahoe’s waters are warming 14 times faster than usual, so the need exists to reconcile what the current meaning of progress really means.

Somewhere in Teshara’s chamber endorsement is mentioned “an adopted vision and principles (that) include a commitment to physical infrastructure that supports business and community” as that half percent funding increase will create \$2.5 million designated only for road repair. While in August, we are also starting with the demolition of Knight’s Inn after protracted discussions on the environmental and fiscal benefits of yet another grocery store, including the inevitable struggle between resource agencies versus development – too much activity left unexplained.

What’s being revealed is contrary to professed support for city and regional improvements, and the Knight’s Inn situation offers the easiest route to explain why: having heard the arguments about a lack of environmental improvements (Knight’s Inn, aka Ramada, aka Tahoe Sands, was built on one of Tahoe’s 60-plus watersheds in the 1950s), the supposed lack of enough watershed improvement caused the California Tahoe Conservancy’s financial support to be withdrawn, so true-to-form, business-as-usual (BAU) prevailed.

As Knight’s Inn has over 100 units, the idea of demolition was never questioned, as a lot of cities across the nation have embraced deconstruction, which in this instance would have allowed the city to begin making headway on the housing affordability issue, thanks to California’s newly-passed “granny flat” laws, which suspend some permitting requirements to allow those who want and need an extra \$500-600/month in

revenue to offer simple housing.

In addition, the mediation for the city, the Conservancy, and the developer could have been abated in more positive directions for all had there been a second look. Very recently, the highly successful Clif (power) Bar company built themselves a 300,000-square-foot, \$90,000,000 LEED platinum manufacturing plant in Idaho. But before they took possession they had the building assessed by a well-known firm devoted to biophilic design, found several things to be improved upon before moving in. A great move considering that food is subject to sanitation issues, along with energy savings, daylighting on their production lines, etc.

Idaho doesn't have a Lake Tahoe to continually correct, so this was indeed the type of value-added approach not yet present in any "adopted vision and principles (that) include a commitment to physical infrastructure that supports business and community" in accomplishing a green and secure future for Lake Tahoe.

Ribaudo's comment, on the other hand, shifted immediately into managing a "system of tourism" when it is already known that those tourists are becoming very much attracted to those "places that take care of themselves," including steps beyond another coat of paint, and beyond those behaviors not usually seen, such as separating trash, doing away with plastic bags (still ubiquitous) or replacing the linens every other day. Green is quite often the deciding factor precisely because of a deeper trust in dedication to preserving what is valuable to a place.

Yet another indication of what now can be seen in AFP terms is that most of the new home subdivisions: Gondola Vista (40-plus), the Sierra Colina project (40-plus) are effectively stripped of earlier requirements toward affordable housing, meaning that some domiciles will stay unattainable as preferences stay unaffordable.

This, of course, is in direct opposition to current municipal planning protocols, except for Tahoe.

Lastly, the city signed on to the idea of “100% Renewable Energy”, but any mention of a missing link in not moving squarely in these directions does not mean progress, but rather that older modes of thinking are being “grandfathered in” as “100% Renewable Energy” is already being compromised via multiple projects that don’t yet appear to be contemporary in thought.

Contemporary is increasingly green, and of strong conservation measures, but need we be reminded of Tahoe’s fragile and vulnerable beauty, not merely an image impressive to “picture-postcard mentalities” expressed in multi-million dollar sales brochures.

Vast amounts of taxpayer money go into supporting Tahoe’s beauty, but that may become problematic (and most certainly declining) unless sustainable development standards are met. Ribaud’s “stay tuned” advice is, as suggested, incomplete, as is Tahoe’s, in comprehending its own managed future.

The idea that California’s population went unnoticed at 40,000,000 is not unnoticed globally, as we now add two California’s per year to the world’s population, in a world changing so fast, we can no longer rely on just money as the only needed commodity to assure a future; we will leave too much of that money on-the-table absent the efficiency and effectiveness needed to fortify our communities.

Activities Feigning Progress is not just a measure; it is a filter and lens with which to determine how much progress is being made, and as well to understand what constitutes success on longer time-spans – not someone’s choice-of-color glasses with a myopic prescription: ill-informed, inconvenient, or not really thought through.

The idea of creating oversight committees is itself inadequate

these days, as the heightening of standards now necessary makes the issue of making sure bills have been paid (on-time) ludicrous, as it is vitally important to now know what the money is being spent on, especially if there are toxicities that don't contribute to either citizen's health or that of Lake Tahoe Basin itself.

Tahoe's LEED platinum TERC building is a great example, being rated No. 4 out of 60 rigorously tested around the world. It operates at about 10 percent of energy required for a building that size.

My next cultural piece will be to introduce the SQ factor, designed to offer ways to get more of us on the 'page' we'll need, not just to suffice, but to thrive, in our extenuated world. My work is global, so I'm familiar with the issues on a reality scale, as the changes mentioned are now "before our eyes."

Garry Bowen has more than a 50-year connection to the South Shore, with an immediate past devoted to global sustainability, on most of its current fronts: green building, energy and water efficiencies, and public health.