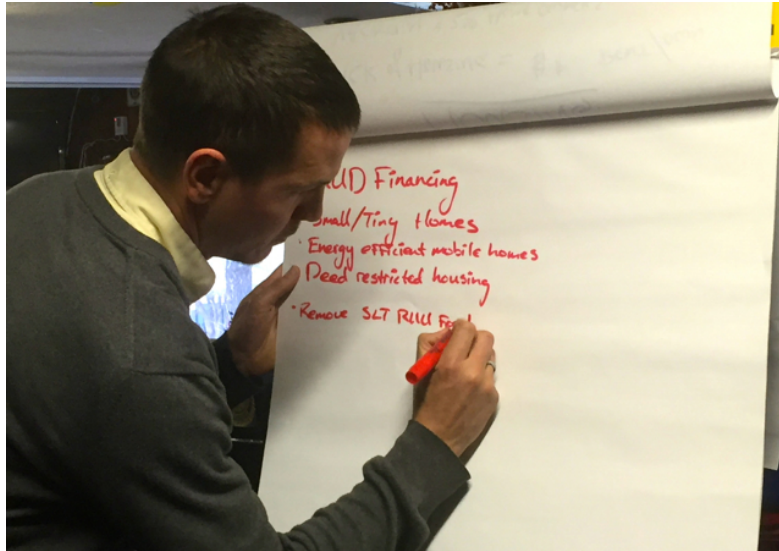


South Shore residents on quest to bring change



Matt Palacio writes ideas about how to improve housing on the South Shore. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Redevelopment, housing, mental health, environment and recreation are the five main concerns of a grass roots group that wants to bring change to the South Shore.

About 20 people met last week at the American Legion in South Lake Tahoe to discuss what they believe could be done to make the area better.

"We can only have progress if we collaborate," Jenna Palacio, who facilitated the April 26 meeting, said.

The discussion was to help the group develop a platform. This month – a meeting date has yet to be set – the goal will be to create a strategy in order to realize objectives. A smaller steering committee was created that night to bring more structure to the group that is known as Tahoe for Progress.

This was the second gathering, with the **initial one in March** generating a turnout of about 80 people. The dwindling attendance could be timing, people wanting a different focus, or the realization change takes work.

It was suggested that surveys be created to generate input from people who cannot attend the meetings. A Facebook page and website may be created to bring the message to more people.

When it came to specifics, those gathered expressed the following ideas-concerns:

- **Redevelopment:** repurpose old motels, put in the loop road, learn from Park City, public-private partnerships, walkable town center, marinas are being ignored, seek federal grants.
 - **Mental health:** increase El Dorado County's budget, get people outside, education, reduce the stigma, address drug use.
 - **Recreation:** contiguous bike trails, vote to raise taxes to get a new rec center, more events, build high-end athletic facility, allow more uses on federal land, water park, address shoulder season slow down.
 - **Environment:** build green-LEED buildings, treat runoff, more renewable energy.
 - **Housing:** lack of affordable rentals, vacation rental and second homes are taking over, change regulations, housing for Lake Tahoe Community College students, second homeowner tax, convert hotels, increase wages, have businesses provide housing.
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Opinion: EDC budget boondoggle a disgrace

By Larry Weitzman

About two years ago, I told the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors that if the budget wasn't cut, they were going to run out of money, money to maintain county roads, buildings and other assets, money to build a new sheriff's HQ and another half dozen items that require about \$12.5 million a year with another \$12.5 million left wanting. But it gets worse as county departments have filed their next year's budget requests and they total \$7 million more than projected revenues, including the use reserves to prop up the revenue number.



Larry Weitzman

That means when you add in the aforementioned \$12.5 million above (\$2.2 million for new sheriff's HQ, \$3 million for road maintenance, \$5 million for deferred maintenance and a capital replacement fund, plus 2.5 million for funding retiree health) it adds up to a \$20 (12.5 + 7) million budget shortfall. The proposed budget as presented (not including the \$20 million), while in balance per government standards (using reserve money to balance it), was structurally imbalanced because annual expenditures exceeded annual revenues. Most people and business work off structurally balanced budgets.

What's even more amazing is that our CAO, Larry Combs,

obviously knew we didn't have the funding to build the new sheriff's HQ a month ago when he advised the BOS to spend \$2.6 million to buy the land upon which to build it. The loan payment would be an ongoing \$2.2 million annual expense for 40 years. Where is this money coming from in year two, year 15 or year 39? No one in our administration has a clue. And this is the guy our BOS takes advice from? Maybe the CAO and BOS need help from our Mental Health Department?

So if we want to fix and maintain the roads, build a sheriffs HQ (I am surprised that the current HQ hasn't been declared a Superfund site), pay retiree health care and another half a dozen or so county items, \$20 million in cuts will have to be made somewhere else in the current proposed budget. Here's a place to start. In the last fiscal year the CAO executed about \$10.5 million in contracts, which were under the \$64,000 requirement of BOS approval. I am sure there are millions in waste there alone. Double damaging is that the CAO only reports these contracts to the BOS once a year. Maybe that should change to a weekly reporting requirement and discussion.

Within the workshop and proposed budget were some BOS platitudes in the form of budget policies like no new positions unless funding is identified or a significant need established. How is that for an out. But the BOS wants that new salesman, (all except Shiva Frentzen) for a \$150,000 public information officer, which in the political world is known as a "spin doctor." The other policy was no growth of non-salary/benefit operating expenses.

But the biggest area on the expenditure side of the budget is salaries and benefits (\$155 million) which is about 70 percent of General Fund spending. And it is the biggest problem area. I am sure, under great pressure, this issue wasn't monetized by the CBO in the presentation, but was shown as percentages in the power point presentation which served as the basis of the four-hour discussion which considered budget items as

small as \$2,500 and several items that were in the \$10K-25K range. Only one BOS member, Frentzen, recognized the real elephant in the room of an annual revenue short fall of \$4 million to \$7 million, the difference between revenue growth and salary/benefit growth. No other BOS member said a word about it or wanted to discuss it and the county administrative staff acted oblivious. It might have been the basic algebra (solving for the unknown) that was beyond their capability (this is not meant to be an indictment of our educational system).

Here is this deficit issue as contained on pages 6, 7 and 8 in the 17-page power-point presentation as presented to the BOS called future year assumptions: property taxes and sales taxes will grow annually at 4 and 2 percent, respectively. Department revenues will grow at 1 percent (about \$1 million). We were told that 1 percent of growth on tax revenues equals \$1 million. That means that that total revenue growth will be about \$4 million in new revenues every year. Expenditures will grow only from salary and benefits at 4.5 percent a year, no new expenses shall be incurred from expenses that are not from sal/bene, and no new positions will be filled unless funded within the budget. The problem is that 4.5 percent equates to \$7 million this year and growing from CalPERS and health benefits as the contribution requirement are on a huge uptick as it was recently reported employer contributions are going up by 9 percent as their investment portfolio continues to perform poorly. This year will be a \$3 million deficit that will continue to grow every year.

A new union contract is already in negotiation. The current contract which provided a 15 percent contract is over in two months. Even a new 1 percent raise in salaries will add \$1.6 million to the growing deficit, plus the projected 4.5 percent growth as health benefits and CalPERS benefit contributions continues to rise. A half a point hike in bene costs will add another \$1 million. Those numbers will outstrip revenue growth

so the dollar gap between total revenue and salary and benefit expense will continue to widen, perhaps by \$10 million in three or four years. As it is now, EDC's budget is unsustainable.

So what did the BOS spend their time on last week? Of course not one word as to the growing built in budget deficit. The BOS is going to use reserves to balance the budget just like the failure of Pan Am Airlines. Near the end, they were losing money every year and to sustain themselves they sold off their profitable route structure to the point they had nothing left to sell. Bankruptcy grounded Pan Am as it became unsustainable. Instead of short circuiting the deficit, the BOS discussed whether they should spend \$25,000 on keeping a swimming pool open longer hours during the summer. Here the county is drowning in built-in continuing deficits of which they refuse to recognize and discuss with the county infrastructure and buildings crumbling around them, and they are worried about swimming pools. It's unbelievable. Worse yet is that Combs never mentions it during the entire meeting. Ditto for the ACAO.

There are two solutions, one of course is raising sales tax a point or two. That could bring in a few million dollars annually to the detriment of taxpayers and merchants, taking away one of their business advantages. It would encourage EDC residents to shop out of the county while sales drop for local merchants. But there is another, better solution and that is to cut expenses. This is where a real CAO comes into to play. Don Ashton or someone like him (maybe he has an identical twin?), will turn this county around. He will end favoritism, demand excellence and value from our work force (more productivity) and most important will tell the BOS the reality of the situation and give them real choices from which they can make real decisions.

Perhaps we should study the solution of the city of South Lake Tahoe when its budget got out of hand. The solution worked

well.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Wet winter a good thing for Truckee River kayakers

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

What a difference a year makes.

Thanks to an El Nino-fueled surge of snowfall in the Sierra Nevada the Truckee River is once again flowing strong through the whitewater park in downtown Reno.

Thanks to an El Nino-fueled surge of snowfall in the Sierra Nevada the Truckee River is once again flowing strong through the whitewater park in downtown Reno.

That means kayakers will return to competition at May 7-8 Reno River Festival, which includes freestyle, slalom and boatercross events. This year River Festival will also serve as the USA Freestyle National Championships, which will help attract top level competitors.

Read the whole story

Bill would necessitate women register for draft

By Richard Lardner, AP

Women would be required to register for the military draft under a House committee's bill that comes just months after the Defense Department lifted all gender-based restrictions on front-line combat units.

A divided Armed Services Committee backed the provision in a sweeping defense policy bill that the full House will consider this month, touching off a provocative debate about the role of women in the military. The panel also turned aside a measure backed by Democrats to punish the Citadel military college in South Carolina for flying the Confederate flag.

The United States has not had a military draft since 1973 in the Vietnam War era, but all men must register with the Selective Service Systems within 30 days of turning 18. Military leaders maintain that the all-volunteer force is working and the nation is not returning to the draft.

The 32-30 vote Wednesday night came with a twist: The proposal's author didn't back it.

Rep. Duncan Hunter, a former Marine who served three combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, does not support drafting women into combat and opposes opening infantry and special operations positions to women. Hunter, R-Calif., said he offered the measure during the committee's consideration of the policy bill to prompt a discussion about how the Pentagon's decision in December to rescind gender restrictions on military service failed to consider whether the exclusion

on drafting women also should be lifted.

That's a call for Congress, not the executive branch, Hunter said. "I think we should make this decision," he said. "It's the families that we represent who are affected by this."

At times, Hunter evoked graphic images of combat in an apparent attempt to convince colleagues that drafting women would lead to them being sent directly into harm's way.

"A draft is there to put bodies on the front lines to take the hill," Hunter said. "The draft is there to get more people to rip the enemies' throats out and kill them."

But if Hunter was trying to sway people against his amendment, his plan did not work.

Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., said she supported Hunter's measure. "I actually think if we want equality in this country, if we want women to be treated precisely like men are treated and that they should not be discriminated against, we should be willing to support a universal conscription," she said.

Rep. Martha McSally, R-Ariz. and a retired Air Force fighter pilot, said draftees aren't exclusively sent to the front lines. There are plenty of other useful, noncombat positions for them to fill, she said.

Reporters pressed White House spokesman Josh Earnest on whether President Obama would hesitate to sign legislation expanding the draft because it would mean his daughters would be required to register. Earnest declined to comment, citing lawsuits that have been filed against the Selective Service System over the exclusion.

If an 18-year-old man does not register with the Selective Service, he could lose his eligibility for student financial aid, job training and government jobs. Immigrant men could

lose their eligibility for U.S. citizenship. According to the latest annual report, 73 percent of 18-year-olds registered on time during the 2015 fiscal year ending last Sept. 30. And the registration rate for all men aged 20-25 was 94 percent.

Hunter's amendment was part of a defense policy bill that authorizes defense spending for the budget year that begins Oct. 1. The committee passed the legislation by a 60-2 vote early Thursday.

The overall bill cuts \$18 billion from the wartime operations account to pay for weapons and troops the Pentagon didn't request, a money-shifting strategy Defense Secretary Ash Carter condemned on Wednesday as a "road to nowhere" that undermines U.S. troops and emboldens America's enemies.

Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, the committee's chairman, defended the plan and said the billions of dollars shifted out of the wartime fund would be restored in a supplemental budget submitted to Congress early next year by Obama's successor. He's argued the committee's approach is essential to halting an erosion of combat readiness that has grown worse on Obama's watch.

On another thorny policy issue, Rep. Adam Smith of Washington, the committee's senior Democrat, offered an amendment that would have barred the Defense Department from financially supporting the ROTC program at any institution that flies the Confederate battle flag.

The Citadel is the only school that fits the profile. The college is in South Carolina Rep. John Clyburn's district. He's not on the committee, but he backed Smith's measure in a statement, calling the Confederate flag a symbol of hate, racial oppression, and resistance to the rule of law.

Republicans said the college's Board of Visitors has voted to remove the flag, but South Carolina state law prohibits the Citadel from doing so.

“This failure to take down the Confederate battle flag is an extremely disappointing statement of principles,” Smith said. “They should have voted to take it down instead of dodging the issue.”

The overall bill authorizes \$602 billion in defense spending for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

South Lake Tahoe grapples with aging fleet

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe’s snowplow fleet was breaking down so much this winter that it eventually resembled scrap metal more than it did working machines.

“Catastrophic” is how staff described the situation. Four pieces of equipment are no longer operable.

“By not replacing them, you lower the level of snow removal next year,” Jim Marino, deputy public works director, warned the City Council.

The newest equipment – three graders and a blower – were purchased in 2007.

To get by this winter the city rented equipment.

At a council meeting last month staff also explained how other departments need new vehicles – like the fire department and airport.

At the same meeting the council agreed to continue the \$20 a

year assessment on property owners for snow removal equipment purchases. This policy has been renewed every year since its inception in 1989. It generates about \$200,000 a year.

The problem is that's not enough money to keep up with needs and escalating costs. A single machine can run \$400,000 new.

That is why the council needs to look to other funding mechanisms

This was all part of a larger discussion about capital improvement needs and how best to spend a potential \$1 million in excess revenue. Those are projections based on current tax revenue, though the fiscal year goes through Sept. 30.

Councilman Austin Sass said to borrow the money out of the General Fund to get whatever snow removal equipment is needed. However, that's not possible. The city can't legally spend money it doesn't have.

"You can't amend the budget without evidence the revenue exists," City Manager Nancy Kerry explained.

The council could take cash out of reserves. That would take four votes to draw down below the 25 percent threshold.

Normally it would be council saying it wants to buy something and then staff coming up with how that could happen. Kerry explained that a funding plan needs to be place.

That is what part of the May 3 council meeting will be about. The possibility of asking voters in November to raise the hotel and sales taxes will be discussed. Still to be decided is if the influx of cash would be dedicated for something in particular – like recreation and/or roads.

If there were to be a dedicated revenue stream for roads, then the amount that goes to them today could be allocated toward something else – like the fleet. That's why staff is paid to come up with big picture ideas with thought behind them.

Grant to help STEM education in Nevada

Higher education institutions in Nevada are using a five-year grant to develop infrastructure for health-related research and STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) education.

The National Institutes of Health gave the money to Sierra Nevada College, UNR, UNLV, College of Southern Nevada, Great Basin College, Nevada State College, University of Nevada School of Medicine; Western Nevada College, and Truckee Meadows Community College.

STEM is where students in the United States trail many other countries.

These partner institutions will use the grant to fund research centers, equipment, supplies, and faculty resources to conduct health research and train undergraduate and graduate students in science disciplines, with the goal of increasing the number of grant applications coming from Nevada to the National Institutes of Health.

Mining residue a threat to

foothills town

By Edward Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

In the Gold Rush-era foothills community of Jackson, the worst-case scenario painted by the Environmental Protection Agency last year about a 100-year-old dam there held a chilling warning.

In a scant two minutes, a breach at the Eastwood Multiple Arch Dam would send a 15-foot-deep mudflow with high levels of arsenic and other toxic chemicals downhill into the center of the historic community. On the way down, the mudflow would pass the entrance to Jackson Junior High School and nearby residences.

The weathered 100-year-old concrete dam is built on the former Argonaut mine roughly a mile north of the town and is so unstable that a big storm or an earthquake could lead to a breach, according to the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers. The result: millions of dollars of property damage and loss of life, with Jackson Creek and the city's sewage system contaminated.

The agency has also put the Argonaut mine on a shortlist of eight sites across the U.S. for possible listing as a Superfund project.

Read the whole story

Zephyr Cove stables to be modernized

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit will begin the first stage of the Zephyr Cove stables upgrade project this week.

Existing facilities, trails and utilities will be upgraded to meet current building code and accessibility standards. Erosion control measures will be put in, too.

The first stage, which will last through mid-July, will include construction of stormwater infiltration basins, and a new driveway and parking area. Under an agreement with Douglas County, a bike path will be constructed from the stables to Warrior Way to improve pedestrian safety and access. This will also decrease impacts to the meadow and Zephyr Creek.

The next step will be to replace the current buildings with one structure, which will include administrative office space, a ticket vending area, an enclosed storage area and public restrooms. Work on this phase of the project will likely begin at the end of summer or in early fall and is expected to be completed by the end of October, with some remaining work possible during summer 2017.

The stable will remain open during the regularly scheduled season, but there may be limited parking.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- Kevin Fabino as is now director of Development Services for South Lake Tahoe.
 - Vacasa, which employs several employees in Lake Tahoe, raised its minimum wage to \$15 hourly nationwide – more than double the federal minimum wage of \$7.25.
 - Permanent restrooms will be built this summer next to the Tahoe Keys tennis courts on Ala Wai in South Lake Tahoe.
 - Here are the El Dorado-Tahoe and Sierra roadwork schedules for the week from Caltrans.
 - The Nevada State Board of Education in April lowered the score need to get a GED. It went from 150 to 145.
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Colo. tourists may be able to buy as much pot as residents

By Associated Press

Colorado's tourists would be able to buy as much marijuana as residents if a bill moving through the Legislature passes.

The measure repeals Colorado's unique-in-the-nation tiered purchasing system for marijuana. All adults over 21 are allowed to possess an ounce of marijuana – but retail pot shops can't sell more than a quarter-ounce in one day to people without Colorado identification.

The purchasing limits were established in 2013 to prevent

marijuana diversion out of state.

Colorado pot regulators now say that tourists carrying small amounts of pot home aren't the state's main marijuana-diversion problem.

Instead, state regulators and local law enforcement point to underground pot growers as the most likely source of sending pot to states where the drug isn't legal.

Colorado's Marijuana Enforcement Division, which oversees pot shops, has never cited a retailer for selling a tourist more than a quarter-ounce of pot.

But the industry fears that new possession limits on concentrated and edible pot due to take effect this fall would make it harder for retailers to keep track. That's because the new rules don't consider leafy pot amounts to be the same as, say, pot brownies or hash oil or a skin lotion infused with marijuana's active ingredient.

"We'd have to hire math professors to work in the dispensaries" to keep track of purchasing limits, said Mark Slaugh, head of the Colorado Cannabis Business Alliance.

Removal of the tiered purchase limits is part of a routine renewal of Colorado's pot regulations. That renewal has passed the state House and is awaiting approval in the state Senate, where an initial committee approved the change Wednesday.