

SLT pushing forward with recreational pot laws

By Kathryn Reed

The goal is for the initial draft of South Lake Tahoe's recreational marijuana ordinance to be completed by the end of the month or early March so the Planning Commission could discuss it at a special meeting next month.

An attorney with Burke, Williams & Sorensen is writing the document. This is because interim City Attorney Nira Doherty, who works for that firm, is on vacation.

The goal is for the council to have an ordinance to discuss at the March 20 meeting.

After a nearly 3½ hour meeting on the topic on Feb. 20, it was decided that the recommendations of the community working group should form the foundation of the ordinance. From there the Planning Commission and City Council will fine tune things.

The main issues still to be debated are the number of shops (three were proposed by the group), where they would be located (anywhere as long they meet buffer requirements for schools and the like, the group says), and whether micro businesses should be allowed (no says the group).

The Tuesday meeting started out as a rehash of what was presented to the council **earlier this month**.

More than 70 people attended the workshop at Tahoe Beach Retreat. This was a joint session of the City Council and Planning Commission. As the presentation was in progress members could ask for a topic to be discussed in depth later. When "later" will be remains a mystery since it didn't happen

at that meeting.

What was a little different was the preferential treatment given to Lake Tahoe Unified School District and Barton Health. Both were asked to be part of the city's working group, both chose not to. They were called up to the lectern first by Mayor Wendy David.

Reps from both spoke of how there is already a drug problem in town and how there aren't enough resources – aka money – to cope.

Police Chief Brian Uhler was also given the opportunity to spend ample time on how he wants to curtail expansion of marijuana in the city limits.

Ironically, though, it was said there is no base line data from which to prove going forward with recreational pot shops would increase or decrease use or crime. It was not explained why the schools, police and Barton can't collate their respective data to come up with solid information.

Many see pot shops as a cash cow in terms of tax revenue. The potential is there. Caution was urged, though, in terms of implementing too high of a tax so as not to drive the product underground where it would be less expensive for the consumer and possibly more dangerous an unregulated drug. Barton and LTUSD are hoping for a piece of the tax revenue.

Opinion: Making progress on Tahoe housing

By Joanne Marchetta

Like many communities across the country, the Tahoe basin is facing an affordable housing crisis. The high cost to buy or rent a home is simply unaffordable for most Tahoe residents. It's a problem for people of many economic backgrounds, including middle-income teachers, nurses, police, and firefighters.

Mountain towns throughout the Western United States and our neighbors in the Bay Area and Reno are also struggling with affordable housing. Today at Tahoe there is unprecedented recognition of this problem and broad consensus that we must work together on solutions. Dozens of community partners are joining forces to address this issue on the North and South shores.



Joanne
Marchetta

This January, the newly-formed Mountain Housing Council, a coalition of 25 partners including local governments, utility districts, nonprofits, and other community stakeholders, as well as TRPA, provided an update on solutions forming to help ensure people have access to achievable local housing in the Tahoe-Truckee region.

The council is targeting construction of at least 300 new affordable housing units over three years, with 295 units either already approved and in progress or under construction. While this amount is far short of what's needed to solve Tahoe's housing crisis, meeting the milestone would mark a major step in the right direction and lay the groundwork for

future progress.

The council is working to flesh out ideas for renovation programs to help ensure the region's existing affordable housing is in good repair, and for increasing the funding available for housing programs. It's also looking for ways to shift more of the second-homes owned by out-of-basin residents, which make up more than half of Tahoe's housing stock and are sitting empty for most of the year or being used as short-term vacation rentals, into longer-term rentals for Tahoe's workforce.

On the South Shore, the Tahoe Prosperity Center is working with public and private partners, including TRPA, on a pilot project to redevelop an old motel lodging site into local workforce housing. This would create not only new housing, but a working model that others could use to repurpose Tahoe's old buildings to provide much-needed housing. This is a collaborative opportunity to revitalize the region and improve its economy, environment, and community.

We must remember there is no silver bullet to fix Tahoe's complex housing problems, no one agency that can solve these problems on its own. But there is a dire need to continue to move forward together.

Incomes for Tahoe's workforce have not kept pace with rising housing prices. Studies find fewer than 20 percent of Tahoe residents earn enough money to afford the region's median housing price. That means we have significant headway to make to align Tahoe's median incomes and housing prices so residents can afford to live, work, and raise families here.

Land costs and construction costs are the largest barrier to building affordable housing. The vast public lands that we all enjoy at Tahoe protect the lake's environmental health and make this region a natural splendor, driving its recreation-based economy. But they also mean there is precious little

land available for new housing, driving up the cost.

Together, land and construction costs account for almost 60 percent of the cost of building new housing at Tahoe. Permitting fees, utility hook-up fees, and the cost of development rights together account for about 10 percent of the total cost.

While permitting is a relatively small part of housing costs at Tahoe, TRPA and local governments are working to streamline the basin's permitting through a welcome mat initiative to make processes easier to understand and navigate.

TRPA is also working to revamp its development rights program. Potential changes on track to be considered later this year would make it easier for people to acquire and transfer development rights and convert them between commercial, tourist, and residential housing uses. Another proposed change would make some of TRPA's pool of residential development rights for low-income housing available for a broader range of incomes. That could help provide housing for the "missing middle," people who earn too much to qualify for low-income housing but too little to afford market rate housing.

A broad range of partners are working together like never before to relieve Tahoe's affordable housing shortage, but we have much more to do. Progress on Tahoe's housing problems will not come easily or quickly. But by continuing to work together to identify and implement creative solutions, we can and will gain ground on housing. That will benefit local families, the economy, and the environment, as more and more residents can live, work, and raise families at Tahoe, and fewer people are forced to drive into and out of the basin each day to or from work to make ends meet.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Man spends night outside after skiing out of bounds

Two men who skied outside of Heavenly Mountain Resort's boundaries were cited after being rescued. One of them had to spend the night in the wilderness with a search and rescue crew.

The incident started Feb. 22 at 5pm when the duo called for help. They told Douglas County sheriff's dispatch they had some water, but were wet and cold, their cell phone batteries were diminished, and one was suffering from a medical condition.

Search and rescue members found Timothy Dane, 24, from Branford, Conn., and Eshai Delacruz, 25, of San Francisco in Mott Canyon.

Delacruz and SAR members were able to get to safety that night. He was cited for skiing out of bounds, which carries a bail/fine of \$640.

Dane was unable to evacuate on foot because of a medical condition unrelated to their misadventure. The storm prevented an air rescue. He and SAR members spent the night in the single-digit weather during the snow storm. Beforehand another SAR team responded to the shelter location to bring medication to Dane.

On Friday morning a Blackhawk rescue helicopter from Fallon Naval Air Station airlifted Dane out of the forest. Once safe he declined further treatment. However, he was cited for skiing out of bounds

SAR teams from El Dorado and Washoe counties assisted.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Debate continues about what is ‘natural’ in food

By Julie Creswell, New York Times

In recent years, one bright spot in an otherwise lackluster market for packaged foods, beverages and consumer products has been merchandise promoted as “natural.”

Consumers, increasingly wary of products that are overly processed or full of manufactured chemicals, are paying premium prices for natural goods, from fruit juices and cereals to shampoos and baby wipes.

But as a spate of lawsuits and consumer advocacy efforts show, one person’s “natural” is another person’s methylisothiazolinone.

Read the whole story

Free help for small businesses on South Shore

Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce is partnering with the Sierra Small Business Development Center to provide small

business consulting in the South Lake Tahoe area.

The free consulting services are focused on helping clients create a feasible business model, assess business opportunities, determine financial needs, identify potential sources of financing, and design an effective strategy to market and grow. This includes meetings at the chamber office with consultants who specialize in public relations and digital marketing, traditional and alternative financing, and business startup. In addition, the full directory of 15 Sierra SBDC consultants is available to small businesses and entrepreneurs through remote access.

The Sierra SBDC, headquartered at the Sierra Business Council, serves a seven-county region in northeastern California including Nevada, Placer and El Dorado counties.

To learn more or register, go **online**.

Calif. weighs renewing drought-era water restrictions

By Jonathan J. Cooper, AP

SACRAMENTO – A proposal to make California's drought-era water restrictions permanent could allow the state to chip away at long-held water rights in an unprecedented power grab, representatives from water districts and other users told

regulators this week.

Members of the state Water Resources Control Board delayed a decision about whether to bring back what had been temporary water bans from California's drought, spanning 2013 to 2017. The plan is part of an effort to make water conservation a way of life, with climate change expected to lead to longer, more severe droughts.

It comes after U.S. officials declared that nearly half the state, all of it in the south, is back in drought just months after emerging from it.

Read the whole story

EDC firefighter accuses chief, male colleagues of sexism

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

LisaMarie Mason began her firefighting career with the El Dorado Hills Fire Department in June 2007, the only female in her class.

For the next decade, Mason claims, she endured a workplace where she was denied training that male firefighters were granted and was subjected to a barrage of sexist comments from her superiors.

"This country went wrong when it allowed women to vote," then-Battalion Chief Dave Roberts allegedly told her, then nicknamed her "Homeplate" when he discovered she was single

because “everyone scores.”

Read the whole story

Lack of snow cancels Great Ski Race

Even though snow has been falling in the Tahoe-Truckee area, organizers have decided to cancel this year’s Great Ski Race.

This is Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue’s main fundraiser. It started in 1977.

Cross country skiers go from Tahoe City to Truckee; a 30 kilometer race.

This year’s event was scheduled for March 4. There will still be a party that day from noon-4pm at Tahoe City Cross Country with donations being accepted for the nonprofit.

Tahoe City teen 6th in international ski race

JC Schoonmaker, a North Tahoe High School senior, Far West skier, and former Tahoe Cross Country strider glider, recently competed at the U18 Nations’ Cup in Finland.

The U18 Nations’ Cup brings the top U18 skiers from Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, United States, and more. The races

competitive and give participants first-hand knowledge of international racing.

On the first day of racing, Schoonmaker placed sixth in the sprint race. This result is one of the top U.S finishes at the U18 Nations' Cup Competition ever.

Dems fight among themselves as they work to replace McClintock

By Emily Cadei, Sacramento Bee

California Democrats face a crucial task as they gather in San Diego this weekend for their annual convention: deciding the party's endorsements in a handful of crowded congressional races. That includes the increasingly fractious 4th Congressional District contest, where some local leaders are hoping the decision to endorse a candidate will help stem some of the infighting – and turn the race's focus to ousting veteran House Republican Tom McClintock.

The traditionally Republican district, which includes El Dorado County, parts of Placer County and eight others that stretch into the Sierra Nevada mountains, has seen a surge of energy and excitement on the Democratic side since President Trump's election. Despite the long political odds, activists believe whichever Democrat gets out of the top-two primary could give McClintock a run for his money.

Two of the three Democrats running for McClintock's seat – Regina Bateson and Roza Calderon – are urging the party to let

the voters sort out who that will be in June, and not weigh in with an endorsement now. But “Democrats, in general, I think they would like to see an endorsed candidate,” said Eric Sunderland, the state party’s regional director based in Sacramento. It could “help clean the field up a little bit.”

Read the whole story