

S. Tahoe council re-enters 'convention center' fray

By Kathryn Reed

While the South Lake Tahoe City Council has always said the convention center project is not a city project, all of a sudden the electeds want to be involved with filling in the hole.

City staff has been on the periphery as the project languished in bankruptcy for more than two years. The council, though, has not publicly been involved until now.



It's unknown if the concrete and rebar at the hole are structurally sound.

Photo/LTN file

Councilmen Hal Cole and Bruce Grego on Tuesday were appointed to an ad hoc committee with City Manager Tony O'Rourke and City Attorney Pat Enright. They have been tasked with conversing with the parties involved with the defunct project near the state line about how to get a plan together before permits expire.

Had a performance bond been required for what was supposed to be a \$410 million project, the city might not have the eyesore it has.

The July 11, 2006, Owner Participation Agreement – the contract between the city and Lake Tahoe Development Company – says, “It is typical of development projects like this one for cities/agency’s [sic] to request the participant to have performance and labor & materials bonds. This insures [sic] that the project once started will be completed. However, the developer is concerned that this will add to the overall cost of the project and point out that the agency will have no financial obligation if the convention center and public improvements are not completed. In addition, the participant’s construction lender will be monitoring the project very closely and will help assure that the project will be completed. The requirement for obtaining these bonds is not included in this agreement.”

Cole, who is a contractor by trade, told this reporter years ago there is no such thing as a performance bond. This was when he was on the council before this stint and while agreements were getting approved.

Market study

Cole along with then Councilman John Upton are the only two councilmembers who are known to have seen the market study that was done in 1995 that “proved” South Lake Tahoe needed a convention center.

The document was not released to the media until last year.

This study is what the electeds based their decision on to go forward with the project at the time – a study the majority never saw. It’s a study that was commissioned by Lew Feldman, the attorney for the developer. Coopers & Lybrand out of Texas put it together.

While in many ways reporting on the study is old news, *Lake Tahoe News* is the first news source to do so.

It is important to know what has happened in the past and who was involved so perhaps history doesn't repeat itself.

It's possible the town is better off with an empty lot instead of more empty buildings. After all, no one saw the recession coming – at least no one associated with this project.

From 470 surveys of regional-state-national event planners this is what they said of the likelihood of having an event in South Lake Tahoe:

	National	Regional	State	Corporate
Definitely yes	10%	15%	22%	15%
Highly likely	4%	16%	7%	8%
Possibly	29%	20%	25%	28%
Unlikely	29%	16%	21%	20%
Definitely no	28%	33%	25%	29%
Source: <i>Coopers&Lybrand</i>				

Those are some of the numbers used by city officials to say a convention center was a must-have building for South Lake Tahoe.

The study says 79 percent of the reasons entities would not choose South Lake Tahoe – like air service, gambling next door, preference of a large city – could not be overcome.

The city was supposed to have a 50-year lease to operate the convention center. This was going to be how it made money in addition to the increase in hotel and sales taxes.

But the market study says, "... the potential convention facility in South Lake Tahoe is estimated to incur an operating deficit in its fifth year of operations, the first year of stabilized operations, of approximately \$67,000 (1995 dollars). This level of operating shortfall is consistent with or slightly less than the results of similar facilities

throughout the country. Furthermore, the financial analysis assumes a significant level of spectator events held in the facility. Without the income that could be generated by such activity, the annual operating deficit could increase by up to \$250,000."

What was released to the public and is in the report is the \$11.4 million per year that was anticipated in spending by people using the facilities – on hotel rooms, food, entertainment and transportation.

The study further states half of the dollars spent would be in California and half in Nevada.

Event organizers, according to the study, ranked room quality and size, number of rooms, and food service quality as top criteria for determining where to have a convention or meeting.

Something that was never budgeted is money to lure conventions to South Lake. But it was a component of the study.

"The marketing of conventions, trade shows and other events requires a substantial amount of time and resources," the study says.

The South Shore doesn't have a convention bureau.

With the Reno airport being a little more than an hour away – without traffic and snow – that, too, could be an issue with potential attendees, the report says.

Had the project been completed, it was expected to compete with mid-sized state and regional facilities.

The project was sold to the public as though the center would be available for community events. The study called for 60 events (national-regional association events, corporate meetings, state association events, public shows, spectator events) that would cover 204 days. The public shows equaled

two events over seven days.

As the process went on, parking was never resolved. The project never had enough spaces to store the number of vehicles expected at the site. Harveys was going to be the place to park. But that agreement was never secured even though construction began.

The study says, "The availability of adequate parking is an important factor in accommodating local and state conventions, trade shows, public shows and certain corporate events. A relatively high percentage of attendees within the local and state event market would likely drive to a convention facility."

Current day issues

Once the project emerged from bankruptcy court earlier this year the clock on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency permit started ticking. It runs out at the end of the year. To start that process all over will be costly and time consuming; potential roadblocks to a developer.

While the 11-plus acre parcel near Harveys and Heavenly Village has sat idle for years because Lake Tahoe Development Company filed bankruptcy in 2009, the future is murky.

Randy Lane of LTDC still owns nine of the parcels. The entire project is 29 parcels because the city allowed concrete to be poured without a final parcel map on file. Sixteen have been foreclosed on, with four in the process. A notice of default has been filed on two of those four, with the sale slated for June 1 in Placerville.

Another twist to the case is the lawsuit filed late last year by Harry Segal who believes he should be a primary creditor and not secondary. That case will be heard in Placerville in El Dorado County Superior Court.

At the April 3 council meeting it was agreed the five want to have a public session with the key players at the second May meeting to hash out what can be done with the property. Cole asked for staff to provide an update on the condition of the concrete and rebar as well as details about the TRPA permit.

He said it's critical decisions are made this summer about the future of the site.

But the city doesn't own the land – which at one time with the improvements that are in place had a value of more than \$100 million – nor does it have the wherewithal to buy it. So, while the property is in the city limits, the council has as much control over getting movement on the site as it does to resolve the tenant issues at the Y.

Truckee police promote one of its own to captain

Robert Leftwich has been promoted to captain in the Truckee Police Department.

Leftwich will lead the Operations Division, which includes patrol, traffic, marine unit, reserve officers and the department's volunteer program.



Robert
Leftwich

Leftwich is a 16-year veteran who spent the majority of his career at the Santa Rosa Police Department. He has extensive experience in investigations and has served as a task force agent for the Drug Enforcement Administration and California Department of Justice.

4th-graders able to get a dose of history outside the classroom

Barsotti Books and the Barsotti family have release an updated version of Joan Barsotti's book "Okei-san: A Girl's Journey, Japan to California, 1868-1871".

Written by Joan Barsotti, the book will be the focus of the inaugural El Dorado READS program. The program will be available to all fourth-grade classrooms in El Dorado County. The "El Dorado Reads Okei-san" project will run from April 9 through May 30.

As part of the program, all schools will have the opportunity to apply for grant funds from the Joan Barsotti Foundation Fund at the El Dorado Community Foundation for a field trip to

visit the Wakamatsu Tea & Silk Colony Farm – which is the site of the Okei-san story. The Wakamatsu Colony Farm, recently acquired and now managed by the American River Conservancy, is located in the Gold Hill area, a mile south of Coloma and the Marshall Gold State Historic Park. The farm was settled by Japanese colonists from Aizu Wakamatsu in July 1869, and is believed to be the first Japanese colony in North America. It also contains the gravesite of Okei Ito, the first Japanese woman buried on American soil. It is the birthplace of the first naturalized Japanese-American, and is the only settlement established by samurai outside of Japan. In large part to its significance in Japanese-American relations, the site is on the National Register of Historic Places.

On the property, students will be able to walk in Okei's footsteps. Events will include touring the farm house where Okei lived, hiking up Okei's favorite hill, and learning about the variety of swords used in Japan during the period before Okei left her home for California. Students will also learn about the art of calligraphy. Additional presentations are being planned.

'An evening with the Washo'

Lake Tahoe Historical Society will present "An evening with the Washo" on April 10 at 6pm.

This free program will be at Camp Richardson Resort in the Great Room.

Speakers will include Darrell Cruz, tribal historic preservation officer; Jo Ann Nevers, author of "Wa She Shu: A

Washo Tribal History”; and Melba Rakow. Both women sit on the Tribal Advisory Council.

The presentation will feature the history of the Washo at Lake Tahoe and in the Carson Valley. During the evening they will discuss ongoing Washo events. Opportunities for questions will follow the presentation.

Opinion: Chamber thankful for successful Business Expo

To the community,

TahoeChamber would like to thank everyone involved for yet another amazing Business Expo. There were 96 exhibiting vendors and more than 1,100 event attendees.

The event could not have happened without the support of our generous sponsors – Getaway Reno/Tahoe, Harrah’s, Heavenly Mountain Resort, Sacramento Airport, Corporate Nevada, South Tahoe Refuse, MUN CPAs, Frontier Communications, K-Tahoe Radio, Lake Tahoe TV, KRLT/KOWL, *Tahoe Daily Tribune*, and Tahoe Arts and Mountain Culture; many thanks to all of them.

A special thank you to the entire team at Harrah’s for hosting the Expo, to emcee Dreu Murin for a job well done, to the volunteers for all their hard work, and to the event exhibitors for truly embracing the “Get Connected” theme.

There were over 100 tweets, Facebook postings, photos and videos sent out during the event. South Tahoe Refuse’s “zero waste contributors” were responsible for encouraging attendees to properly dispose of their trash, resulting in almost 500

pounds of food waste and plastic products being recycled and composted to help keep our community clean.

Thanks again to the South Shore business community for a great event.

Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce

South Tahoe Wooden Boat Classic

The 5th annual South Tahoe Wooden Boat Classic is July 27-28 at the Tahoe Keys Marina and Yacht Club in South Lake Tahoe.

Regional fire chiefs worry about structures near wildland

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

More people are moving into areas abutting wooded and brushy terrain of the wild, putting more lives and property at risk of wildfire in a situation made more dangerous by a warming climate.

Such was a central message issued to a convention of fire chiefs in Reno last week to discuss issues associated with

fire danger in the so-called wildland-urban interface. The five-day conference occurred in a community where nearly 60 homes were destroyed by a pair of dangerous wintertime blazes within a two-month period and at a time a deadly wildfire was burning on the outskirts of Denver.

Expect more of the same in the years ahead, experts told the chiefs during a discussion of wildfire conditions of the future.

“We have a very dangerous situation on our hands,” said Arthur “Butch” Blazer, former state forester for New Mexico and currently deputy undersecretary for natural resources and the environment for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Decades of suppressing fire have resulted in overgrown forests ready to burn, while a warming climate is making for longer, larger and more intense fire seasons, attendees of the conference hosted by the International Association of Fire Chiefs were told.

Complicating that hazardous combination is the growing number of people moving into the urban-wildland boundary where the risk of damaging wildfire is greatest, said Faith Ann Heinsch, a research ecologist with the U.S. Forest Service based at a fire sciences laboratory in Montana.

More than 9 percent of homes nationwide are now located within the wildland-urban interface, with the number rising to 50 percent in 19 states, Heinsch said.

Read the whole story

Marketing Research seminar in Tahoe City

North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce and Plumas Bank in partnership with the Small Business Development Center of Greater Sacramento/Sierra are offering Marketing Research on April 10, 9am to noon at the Tahoe City Public Utility District Board Room, 221 Fairway Drive, Tahoe City.

The workshop is geared for existing and emerging business owners. Attendees will learn the overview of the “4-P’s” of marketing, demographic and psychographic data along with industry trends.

This workshop will be followed by a series of interactive SBDC sessions that will highlight Financial Projections (April 24) and Business Plan Components (May 8), which will discuss legal structure and operation.

The workshops are free for North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce members, \$25/person for business association members and \$50/person for the general public.

To register or for more information about the workshop, call Kym Fabel at (530) 581.8764.

Traveling photo exhibit to stop at LTCC

Lake Tahoe Community College’s Haldan Art Gallery is the next stop for the Nevada Arts Council’s traveling exhibition program.

There will be an artists' reception April 12 from 6-8pm for "Great Basin Exteriors: A Photographic Survey". This is an exhibit of 20 photographs by three regional artists – Adam Jahiel, Daniel Cheek and Nolan Preece. The artists' work examines loss, change and abandonment in the West.



Pony Express
Trail near
Austin, Nev.
Photo/Daniel
Cheek

In this exhibit, the Great Basin is roughly defined as the area between the Wasatch Mountains and the Sierra.

The exhibit will be up April 12-June 15. Gallery hours are Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday 11am-5:30pm, Friday 11am-2:30pm.

2 businesses not open at S. Tahoe Y because of landlords

By Kathryn Reed

Landlords are holding up the opening of the new gas station at the Y in South Lake Tahoe as well as the T.J. Maxx store.

While improvements to both buildings are nearly complete, the tenants are not allowed to open their doors.

The issue with the gas station – which is owned by Raley's – is one of the driveways is on a separate parcel. The smaller parcel, where the station is, has one owner and the main shopping center is land owned by someone else.



Driveway
issues are
keeping the
gas station at
the Y in South
Tahoe from
opening.

Photo/LTN

Even though Seven Springs, which owns the center, has Raley's the grocery store as its anchor tenant, it is not playing nice. Seven Springs wants \$10,000 a month from the gas station to allow people to use the right-of-way.

The South Lake Tahoe Planning Commission is expected to discuss the driveway configuration at its April 12 meeting.

Kitty corner to this land dispute is the issue with whether T.J. Maxx will ever move in.

The store, which wants to open, is still fine-tuning things with the property owners.

The tenant permit is ready to go. All they have to do is pick

it up from the city. The city has also approved the sign application.