South Lake Tahoe to undo decades of neglect to its roads

By Kathryn Reed

Without a single member of the public to witness the discussion or vote in person, the South Lake Tahoe City Council unanimously agreed March 6 to borrow $5 million to begin repairing roads.

With interest it will cost more than $10 million in taxpayer money in the next 30 years to pay back that $5 million certificate of participation.

About 14.5 miles of roads will be improved with $4 million starting in June. The other $1 million will be divvied up between improvements to Harrison Avenue and Linear Park. (There are 259 lane miles belonging to the city.)



Rocks fill a hole on Venice Drive in an attempt to keep vehicles from needing a wheel alignment. Photo/LTN

Councilman Hal Cole in particular was miffed no one was in the room to witness the councilmembers merely doing the job they were elected to do. He thought they were doing something grander. The reality is these five are cleaning up the mess of previous councils and administrations that put infrastructure as a low priority and in turn has resulted in taxpayers paying twice as much for what many consider basics in city government – roads.

One street that will be repaired is Venice Drive. Cracks and holes are so wide a mountain bike is needed to ride on it because thin road bike tires are likely to get a snakebite flat.

Evan Williams, who lives on this street in the Tahoe Keys, says he remembers when it was so smooth roller skating on the street was like being on glass.

The city has a backlog of $320 million in deferred maintenance and rehabilitation to its roads.

Jim Marino, capital improvements manager, told the council it's important to spend money on maintenance to protect prior improvements and to get the most longevity out of a road.

"It is nearly six times more expensive to rebuild a road than it is to maintain it," Marino said.

What's called the collector and arterial roads will be focused on first.

A chip and cape approach will be tried in some areas to determine if this method is effective in Tahoe's winter environment. Instead of stopping after the seal part, which is normal, the cape is a second step where thicker petroleum is used.

Some discussion centered on whether any of this work would resonate with Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board.

“No” was the answer because credits in the Total Maximum Daily Load initiative are not given for fixing roads even though that fine sediment is often touted as one of the main contributors to the decline of lake clarity.

When the City Council a year ago approved the strategic plan the goal was to spend 80 percent of the borrowed $25 million in five years to bring the city’s streets up from what many call Third World conditions. (The council is expected to revisit the strategic plan at the March 20 meeting.)

The city has the resources to pay back $10 million in loans, or two year’s worth of work.

The plan is to go to the voters in 2013 to ask for the transient occupancy tax to be increased starting the following year. That in addition to an amusement tax would fund the remaining three years of significant road repairs.

Part of the theory is the influx of vehicles on city streets from tourists is speeding up the degradation of the roads so those people should help pay for the upkeep.

The reason to put off the TOT hike is to let the hotel industry recover after such a dismal winter when it came to occupancy. City Manager Tony O’Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News* the city expects TOT for January and February to be down $300,000.

When it comes to the work that will be done this summer, Marino said the price of oil could play a role in how much work gets done. He also said to expect delays when the construction season begins, especially with Caltrans coming back to work on Highway 50.

Family of deceased twin 73-year-olds located

By Jonathan Mum, News 10

Late Wednesday afternoon, the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office was finally able to locate a relative of 73-year-old twins Patricia and Joan Miller, whose bodies were found after a welfare check at their South Lake Tahoe home in late February.

The search for family members to notify them was hampered by the twins' naming only each other as next of kin. Apparently, they were always guarded about their private lives and were said to have been almost reclusive in the last year or two.

"I've had information from the neighbors," Detective Matt Harwood said. "One hadn't seen them in six months, one hadn't seen them in a year."

A neighbor, who has lived across the street from the twins since back in the 1970s, was surprised to learn the two had been entertainers; they apparently started in show business as children.

"Maybe Mom and Dad got them in the entertainment business," Harwood said. "Mom played piano and Dad did some singing."

Read the whole story

Rotary St. Patrick’s Day celebration

The 44th annual Tahoe Douglas Rotary St. Patrick’s Day celebration is March 16 at 6pm at Harrah’s Lake Tahoe.

The evening includes a silent auction, live auction, full Irish buffet, wine tasting, entertainment and dancing.

A new addition this year is the wine grab. For $10 people can buy a bottle of wine that will be inside a bag, so you won’t know if you’re getting a $50 bottle of wine or one that is $10 or $20 in value.

Tickets to the event are $55 each or a table of 10 is $500. There will be a week in Hawaii and $1.000 in cash raffled off during the evening.

Silent auction are available on line until March 14.

Funds raised during the evening stay locally.

For more information and tickets, email spdc@tdrotary.com or call 800.576.8372.

Kids-parents night at South Tahoe Rec Center

Kids-Parents Night Out at the South Lake Tahoe Recreation

Center is March 9 form 6-10pm.

This is for grades K-8.

The $20 fee includes pizza dinner, swimming, games and a movie. Call (530) 542.6056 to register.

The Next Kids Night Out is March 23.

Hands-on science expo for students and adults in Incline

UC Davis's Tahoe Environmental Research Center in partnership with Lake Tahoe School and Tahoe Expedition Academy will host the seventh annual Science Expo this month.

The Science Expo features interactive experiments and demonstrations for children ages 6 to 12 and their families.

The Science Expo is open to the general public on March 14 from 4–6pm at the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences in Incline Village. Ice cream will be provided by Susie Scoops of Incline Village. Admission is free.

The 2012 Science Expo will showcase 20 hands-on exhibits, activities and demonstrations emphasizing Life Science concepts including:

Different forms of life

Microorganisms

Nano-, micro- and macro-scales of life

DNA

Plankton

Fish of Lake Tahoe

Metamorphosis

Photosynthesis

Pollen, seeds and plants

And much more.

Last year, nearly 700 people, students and parents, came through the Science Expo event. The event is hosted annually on a three-year cycle with emphasis on Life Science (2012), Physical Science (2013) and Earth Science (2014).

This year, students from Kings Beach, Incline Village, Tahoe City, Truckee and South Lake Tahoe will be attending during the school days of March 12-15.

The Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences is located at 291 Country Club Drive in Incline Village.

For more information, call (775) 881.7566.

USFS going after funds for OHV recreation; public input sought

The U.S. Forest Service will be submitting an annual application to the state Department of Parks and Recreation,

Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division to request funding to provide trail maintenance, restoration, conservation, patrolling, education and law enforcement for off-highway vehicle trails and areas.

In addition, over snow vehicle funding to support law enforcement, patrol, and public education is also being requested.

These grants will be available online for public review and comment through April 2. Any comments that are submitted to this site will go to the state and to the individual National Forest.

As part of the grant process, the Forest Service proposes to issue a decision memo for the repair and maintenance of these recreation areas identified in the grant proposal.

If you have information that is specific to this proposed action that the Forest Service may not be aware of or information regarding potential environmental effects from work associated with these grants, please submit your comments to Fran Herbst at fherbst@fs.fed.us. Submit these comments in early March. If you have questions, contact Fran Herbst at (530) 478.6852.

Eating pizza to benefit Save the Park Fund

A benefit to raise money to protect Washoe Meadows State Park will be March 12 from 4-9pm at Lake Tahoe Pizza Company.

Fifteen percent of sale will go to the Save the Park Fund.

Tahoe Cool Water will provide the music. There will also be a cash-only silent auction.

Lake Tahoe Pizza Company is at 1168 Highway 50, South Lake Tahoe.

For more information, email washoemeadowsinfo@yahoo.com.

Free classes bridge the digital divide

Bridging the Digital Divide is a free 30-minute individual training sessions for many popular digital devices including laptops, tablets, eReaders and smart phones.

Classes are at the South Lake Tahoe branch library, 1000 Rufus Allen Blvd. Call (530) 573.3185 to make an appointment.

Spring paddle

Lake Tahoe Water Trail’s annual Spring Paddle is May 19 from 9am-1pm.

Launch from Commons Beach in Tahoe City for a morning paddle, followed by lunch at Sunnyside.

Interpretive guides will navigate and educate about the Lake Tahoe environment. All ages and skill levels are welcome.

For more information and registration, go online.

Nevada think tank publishes sourcebook for policymakers, public

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – A conservative Nevada think tank last week published a guide for policymakers and the public on issues ranging from the state spending to public education to tax policy.

The 88-page sourcebook, called "Solutions 2013" is a compilation of research and policy recommendations from the Nevada Policy Research Institute addressing 39 different subject areas.

The publication comes 11 months before the Nevada Legislature will convene in 2013 to consider a host of critical issues, and just as the 2012 election season gets officially under way with candidate filing that began Monday.

"This collection dispels many popular misconceptions about Nevada, while highlighting new approaches to policy making," said NPRI President Andy Matthews in an introduction to the guide. "My hope is that, regardless of where your political sympathies may lie, you will consider these ideas on their merits."

Geoffrey Lawrence, NPRI's deputy policy director, said even those who disagree with the recommendations can use the data cited in the guide.

"I think this is valuable for everyone who is interested in

public policy regardless of their particular political persuasions because there is a lot of objective data in there that you can draw your own conclusions from if you like," he said. "I think one of the other values of it is that you can see that our conclusions are drawn straight from these objective data sources so they are not just things that we're coming up with out of thin air."

The organization weighs in on the potential of a Texas-style margin tax being imposed on Nevada businesses, which it says should be rejected. A coalition of education and labor groups is contemplating putting such a revenue generator on the state ballot, but no such proposal has been filed yet with the Secretary of State's office.

"The business margin tax is a hybrid, combining negative features of both corporate-income and gross-receipts taxes," the policy guide says. It quotes the Tax Foundation as saying, "the Texas 'margin' tax is really a badly designed corporate income tax."

The NPRI guide says a margin tax would create a tax liability even for businesses that operate at a financial loss, meaning the tax also possesses the negative attributes of gross receipts taxation.

The organization also takes up the issue of a state-run lottery, an idea that gets attention from lawmakers virtually every legislative session. NPRI notes that such lotteries do not generate a lot of revenue and are not stable sources of income.-run lottery fails every test of a "good" tax policy. In Nevada, gaming should be left to the private sector,'" the guide says.

"As Price Waterhouse – the Nevada Legislature's own tax consultant – has concluded, 'A state-run lottery fails every test of a "good" tax policy. In Nevada, gaming should be left to the private sector,'" the guide says.

NPRI weighs in on the issue of what, if anything, should be done about the current public employee retirement system. Gov. Brian Sandoval and some lawmakers have called for a change to the plan to make it a 401(k)-style defined contribution plan instead of the current “defined benefit” plan so that concerns of the potential long-term liabilities of the retirement plan can be addressed.

NPRI argues for a hybrid plan as adopted by the Utah Legislature to avoid the high upfront costs associated with a wholesale change to a defined contribution plan.

“Utah’s system was put in place with the enactment of Senate Bill 63 from Utah’s 2010 General Legislative Session, which should serve as a model to guide Nevadans,” the policy guide says.