South Tahoe to ask voters to raise business license tax

By Dan Tirabasso

In a 4-0 decision Tuesday, the South Lake Tahoe City Council decided to give residents another opportunity to vote on a tax revision aimed at increasing revenue for the city. (Councilwoman Angela Swanson was absent.)

The June 5 ballot measure would increase the tax on the city's largest companies by increasing the maximum business license tax from $3,448 to $20,000, while at the same time lowering the overall business license tax rate by 5 percent. It would mean a business would need gross revenues of $20 million to hit the $20,000 fee.

"… the business license tax will be decreased for approximately 99 percent of the businesses in the city, and increased for 1 percent of businesses," the staff report says.

Finance Director Christine Vuletich on Feb. 7 told the council the tax increase could generate between $200,000 and $270,000 a year. The money would go into the city's general fund, to be used as the city sees fit.

With the tax increase, it would mean just more than $1 million for the city coffers.

At the meeting, Vuletich said the $20,000 would be paid by three to five businesses, but not everyone agrees with that assessment.

According JoAnn Conner, president of the South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce, under this proposal five to 10 of the largest

businesses will feel the pinch of this nearly 600 percent increase.

“We do communicate with these businesses, and we do know some of them are incurring increased costs because of new mandates from the feds and the state. So they’re experiencing higher costs and lower profit margins, in some cases,” Conner, who was at the meeting, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “So, we are concerned that if you implement new taxes and licensing fees at this point, some of those businesses will end up either downsizing more or cutting employee hours.”

But the majority of the council believes the tax increase makes things more equitable. Councilman Tom Davis is not in favor of raising taxes, but does agree the voters should decide.

Vuletich said overall about 47 of the approximately 3,000 businesses in South Lake Tahoe will see their business license fee go up if the measure passes.

Voters narrowly shot down a similar proposal, Measure E, on Nov. 2, 2010. It would have increased the maximum business license tax to $10,000, while reducing the overall business licensing tax rate by 10 percent.

Opponents of Measure E stated it was too tough on large businesses with low profit margins. They also said that by not eliminating the up to 3 percent annual increase that is tied to the Consumer Price Index, which is designed to keep pace with inflation, the 10 percent tax reduction would eventually be right back where it started, if not beyond.

The CPI adjustment would be eliminated under the new proposal.

This raises the concern that the already financially hobbled city may eventually have to endure a further reduction in revenue as inflation increases.

“It’s a concern, but not at this moment. We could always put it back on the ballot at a future time or just adjust the rates,” City Attorney Patrick Enright said.

If the measure passes with a simple majority, fees would go up July 1 – the annual date businesses must renew their licenses.

Current Rate	**Proposed Rate**
Schedule A: $1.10	$1.05
Schedule B: $1.65	$1.57
Schedule C: $2.20	$2.09
Schedule D: $2.75	$2.61
Schedule E: $3.30	$3.14

This is per $1,000 of gross receipts.

Yosemite wants to eliminate scalping of Half Dome permits

By Joshua Emerson Smith, Merced Sun-Star

When you think of the final 400-foot ascent of the Yosemite Valley’s Half Dome Trail, what words come to mind? “Majestic?” “Breathtaking?” “Crowded?”

How about “expensive”?

Last year, visitors paid as much as $100 to hike the famous trail.

Over the past two years, to address dangerously overcrowded conditions, park officials have cut in half the daily number of Half Dome hikers by instituting an advance-sales permitting process.

After officials capped Half Dome hikes at 400 people a day, some abused the system by scalping the $4.50 tickets.

This year, the permitting process will continue with a few changes to curb the resale of tickets.

“To help make the system fair and to limit scalping, we are implementing the lottery system,” said Kari Cobb, park spokeswoman. “So everyone puts in at one time, and then in April we send notification to tell people if they were successful.”

Starting in March, people will be able to throw their name — and an application for up to six guests — in the digital hat for a nonrefundable fee of $4.50 online and $6.50 over the phone. If selected, a $5 fee is charged for each person in the group. The per-person fee is refundable if the trip is canceled two days in advance.

Read the whole story

Homewood water quality project under review

The Placer County Department of Public Works is soliciting public comments on the Homewood Water Quality Improvement Project. The public comment period ends Feb. 18.

Comments may be sent the Department of Public Works, 7717

North Lake Blvd., Kings Beach, CA 96143, or emailed to kmcgahan@placer.ca.gov.

There will be a public meeting on the document on Feb. 10 at 7pm at the Placer County Department of Public Works Kings Beach Conference Room.

Construction is expected to begin in late summer. The project area generally includes the neighborhood streets between Cherry and Silver, west of Highway 89 along the West Shore, north of the Homewood Mountain Resort Lodge.

More information is available on the county's website.

---

2 meetings to discuss classification of Upper Truckee River

Trout Unlimited and California Trout are hosting two open houses to discuss a proposal for the Upper Truckee River in Meiss Meadows to have the Wild and Scenic River designation.

The South Lake Tahoe open house is Feb. 21 from 4-7pm at the El Dorado County Library, 1000 Rufus Allen Blvd. The Markleeville open house is Feb. 22 from 3-6pm at the Alpine County Library, 270 Laramie St.

Trout Unlimited and California Trout believe the Upper Truckee River running free through Meiss Meadows is worthy of Wild and Scenic River Designation under the Wild and Scenic River Act of 1968. The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit and Pacific Southwest Region of the U.S. Forest Service recommended Wild and Scenic designation for the Upper Truckee in a 1990

management plan and subsequent 1999 report.

Washoe Meadow controversy may be resolved with mediation

Washoe Meadows Community, which filed a lawsuit in November against the State Parks Commission and Department of State Parks for environmental studies inadequacies and statutory violations related to the unprecedented reclassification of a state park, has submitted a request for mediation.

This was done after the state filed its CEQA notice of decision following the Jan. 27 rehearing of Washoe Meadow State Park issues.

“Washoe Meadows Community is willing to proceed in good faith efforts to find a mutually agreeable solution. It would be a shame if this situation replicates the duration of the campaign that originally saved the parkland from development, a 12-year process that ended in 1984 with a state emergency statute and purchase of the area recognized as containing ‘unique and irreplaceable resources’,” the group said in a press release.

Business Expo workshop

Business Expo Training Workshop is March 10 from 10am-noon at the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce office at 169 Highway 50 in Stateline.

Membership Director Shannon McIsaac will go over the basics in trade show etiquette. This interactive workshop will go over the best ways to engage visitors at your booth, how to get the most out of your booth and how to capitalize on this year's Expo theme "Get Connected!"

This workshop is free to businesses that have signed up to exhibit at the 2012 Business Expo by March 1. The workshop is $15 thereafter and $20 for non-members.

Contact Emily Abernathy at Emily@TahoeChamber.org or (775) 588.1728, ext. 303.

Court: Gay-marriage ban unconstitutional

By Maura Dolan, Los Angeles Times

SAN FRANCISCO – A federal appeals court Tuesday struck down California's ban on same-sex marriage, clearing the way for the U.S. Supreme Court to rule on gay marriage as early as next year.

The 2-1 decision by a panel of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals found that Proposition 8, the 2008 ballot measure that limited marriage to one man and one woman, violated the U.S. Constitution. The architects of Prop. 8 have vowed to appeal.

The ruling was narrow and likely to be limited to California.

“Proposition 8 served no purpose, and had no effect, other than to lessen the status and human dignity of gays and lesbians in California,” the court said.

The ruling upheld a decision by retired Chief U.S. District Judge Vaughn R. Walker, who struck down the ballot measure in 2010 after holding an unprecedented trial on the nature of sexual orientation and the history of marriage.

In a separate decision, the appeals court refused to invalidate Walker’s ruling on the grounds that he should have disclosed he was in a long term same-sex relationship. Walker, a Republican appointee who is openly gay, said after his ruling that he had been in a relationship with another man for 10 years. He has never said whether he and partner wished to marry.

Read the whole story

Swiss build first solar-powered chairlift

By Michael Frank, Adventure Journal

Even though as the crow flies, the postage-stamp town of Tenna, Switzerland, isn’t far from historic resorts like St. Moritz and Davos, Tenna is a one-horse town, one-shop, one-school, and one t-bar town. And that t-bar, the only ski lift in the whole valley, was on its last legs. But rather than let it die, locals raised enough money to update it and then went a step further: They built the world’s first solar-powered ski

lift.

It’s more than solar-powered, in fact – it’s a smart investment. The Tenna lift generates 90,000 kilowatts a year, or three times the juice needed to run the lift, and the extra power goes back into the grid, which makes money for the town, which can pay residents back.

So what happens to the 82 solar “wings” when it dumps? Not a problem, because they rotate to follow the path of the sun in the sky and can be tilted to perpendicular during a storm, so there’s no load and the snow slides right off.

Read the whole story

Ballot initiative is pot industry’s next move in California

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

A proposed ballot initiative aimed for the November elections begs a key question looming over California’s medical marijuana industry: Can stricter state regulation keep the federal government from shutting it down?

Dispensaries, medical marijuana growers and a powerful union local are rallying behind an initiative that would regulate California’s $1.5 billion pot trade.

They predict they will be able to raise $2 million from medical marijuana businesses and drug policy groups to qualify the measure for the November ballot. A drive to gather a

required half-million valid voter signatures could begin this week after Attorney General Kamala Harris completes a legal summary and petitions are certified by Secretary of State Debra Bowen.

California's medical marijuana economy is mostly governed by local governments, often with conflicting rules. The proposed initiative, the "Medical Marijuana Regulation, Control and Taxation Act," would largely put the state in charge.

It would establish a medical marijuana enforcement bureau in the Department of Consumer Affairs. A commission – with majority representation from the medical cannabis community – would oversee the enforcement bureau, license dispensaries and marijuana cultivators, and set standards for the pot trade.

The effort is a political compromise by wary factions.

The "Emerald Growers Association" from the Humboldt and Mendocino counties pot country signed on after initiative backers rejected a model based on the dispensary-run pot growing centers used in Colorado. The group wanted assurances that rural outdoor pot cultivators wouldn't be cut out of the market by urban indoor growers.

The United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 5, which two years ago backed the Proposition 19 effort to legalize marijuana for recreational use, signed on to the new initiative after deciding it was the best option to protect union jobs in the pot industry.

The effort also includes Americans for Safe Access, an Oakland-based advocacy group for medical cannabis users that stayed out of the Proposition 19 fight.

Read the whole story

Neighborhood meeting

If you live, own or work at a business in Stateline residential, Lakeside Park, Heavenly Valley, Tahoe Meadows or Bijou Park, the city of South Lake Tahoe is having a neighborhood service team meeting Feb. 21 from 2:30-4:30pm.

It will be at the Best Western Station House in the conference room, 901 Park Ave.

The flyer had more meeting information.