Opinion: City Council throws road repairs under the bus

By Steve Kubby

What is the real budget for fixing our streets and how much will the South Lake Tahoe City Council be spending this year on badly needed road maintenance and pothole repairs?

Much has been written lately about the “new” City Council and its commitment to fixing our broken roads, which have gone virtually unfunded for 15 years. In fact, Nancy Kerry, the South Lake Tahoe public affairs and communications manager, recently responded to a column I wrote saying, “The City Council and city manager have for the past many months been stressing the importance of fixing the city’s streets. It is inaccurate to say otherwise. The City Council as a whole and each individually are on the record of stressing the importance of fixing the streets, advocating for the fixing of streets. The city has recently adopted a five-year financial plan where throughout, the importance of fixing the streets and improving the built environment are declared priorities.”



Really? That’s great to hear, but what does that actually translate to in budgeted dollars?

According to Jim Marino, engineer with the city, it will take $5.2 million a year for 25 to 30 years – just to get the streets up to par. That was back in 2009 and since then the City Council has done nothing to address this rapidly escalating unfunded liability. What was once repairable, is rapidly becoming so damaged that it must now be replaced.

Every year we delay incurs even greater liabilities and destruction of our infrastructure.

So what percent of that figure will the City Council be spending this year? It's not easy to find the answer. Buried in the Capital Improvement budget is a budget for the "declared priority" of fixing our streets.

So, what is the real budget for fixing our streets? It turns out that the City Council has not even budgeted a tiny fraction of the $5.2 million a year for 25 to 30 years just to get the streets up to par. No, this "declared priority" of fixing our streets will receive a total budget of $100,000 or about 2 percent of what is needed. Furthermore, despite the "Five-Year Financial Plan," there is no actual budget for spending any more than 2 percent next year or the next five years.

Now, after 15 years of criminal neglect, the best the City Council can do for the "declared priority" of finally addressing this escalating unfunded liability, is to budget 2 percent of what is needed?

Our streets are not going to fix themselves. Every year we delay adds millions of dollars of debt to our community, our business and our homeowners. Either the citizens of this wonderful town demand a full budget to fix our streets or we can expect further economic decline for what was once a great destination resort. It is time to face the reality that you cannot have a world-class resort with Third World streets.

Frankly, if the City Council cannot even come up with an adequate budget to fix our crumbling roads, then it is worthless and should be dissolved.

Steve Kubby is a resident of South Lake Tahoe.

Carson City becomes a food-wine mecca

Carson City's 18th Annual Taste of Downtown is June 18 from 5:30-9pm.

It benefits Advocates Against Domestic Violence.

The event features more than 25 restaurants, wine bistros, pubs and more covering 11 city blocks.

Live bands at various locations ward off food comas and keep the atmosphere lively.

Tasting runs from 5:30 to 9pm and music continues until 11pm.

For tickets and more information, call (775) 883.7654.

Skier visits drop 12% – too much snow to get to resorts

By Hugo Martín, Los Angeles Times

California ski operators often complain that they don't have enough snow. This year, they're complaining that they had too much.

Mountain resorts saw a 12 percent decline in skiers and snowboarders this season compared with the previous one, with attendance falling to about 7.1 million, according to

California Ski Industry Assn., the nonprofit trade group for the state's major winter sports areas.



Snowstorms kept people from visiting ski areas in the 2010-11 season.
Photo/LTN file

The trouble was that near-record snow too often closed roads or discouraged driving to the slopes under harsh conditions — particularly during crucial weekend periods.

"Had the snow fallen in the right times, it would have been a sensational season," said Bob Roberts, director the trade group. "It was a challenging year."

The bad timing began around the Christmas holidays and happened again in March, when fierce storms dropped so much snow on weekends that it prevented eager skiers and snowboarders from getting to the resorts.

Instead of colossal attendance numbers to match the massive snowfall this season, the state's ski resorts have reported an overall drop in visitor numbers compared with last season, when there was less snow but easier access to the slopes.

In California, where all outdoor activities generate about $44 billion in spending annually, weather can affect ski resort revenue, the length of the white-water rafting season and even

attendance at county fairs.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Derby Dames bout

Tahoe Derby Dames first home bout is June 11.

Tickets are $10 and can be purchased at the gate. Season passes are available at Road Rash Cafe (four bouts $32). A portion of the proceeds go to South Lake Tahoe Park and Recreation Scholarship Fund.

Bouts are at Bijou Community Park in South Lake Tahoe.

Don’t forget your sunglasses and a little cash for some Gates open at 4pm. bout starts at 5pm. After party at Brothers Bar and Grill.

Vacation home market faces long road to recovery

By Rob Reuteman, CNBC.com

The buyers’ market for vacation homes is likely to continue for years, with activity largely limited to buyers with enough cash to circumvent a tighter, post-recession lending environment.

Thirty-six percent of all vacation-home buyers in 2010 did not

use a mortgage – versus 29 percent the year before – while more than half of them financed less that 70 percent of the purchase price, according to the National Association of Realtors. Of those who bought a second home as a rental investment, 59 percent paid cash.

“Mortgage lending in the past three years has been pretty rough, with much higher underwriting standards,” says Paul Bishop, NAR’s vice president for research. “People drawn into the market at this point are buyers with substantial cash, or people not dealing with a mortgage. If your credit is strong and you put down a sizeable down payment, lenders are more interested.”

Vacation homes remain the hardest-hit sector of the U.S. real estate market. Sales fell 1.8 percent to 543,000 in 2010, according to the NAR’s 2011 Investment and Vacation Home Buyers Survey. The median price was $150,000 in 2010, down 11.2 percent from $169,000 in 2009.

Read the whole story

Record snowpack could threaten Western states

By Kirk Johnson and Jesse McKinley, New York Times

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, Colo. – For all the attention on epic flooding in the Mississippi Valley, a quiet threat has been growing here in the West where winter snows have piled up on mountain ranges throughout the region.

Thanks to a blizzard-filled winter and an unusually cold and

wet spring, more than 90 measuring sites from Montana to New Mexico and California to Colorado have record snowpack totals on the ground for late May, according to a federal report released last week.

Those giant and spectacularly beautiful snowpacks will now melt under the hotter, sunnier skies of June — mildly if weather conditions are just right, wildly and perhaps catastrophically if they are not.

Fear of a sudden thaw, releasing millions of gallons of water through river channels and narrow canyons, has disaster experts on edge.

“All we can do is watch and wait,” said Bob Struble, the director of emergency management for Routt County in north-central Colorado. The county’s largest community, Steamboat Springs, sits about 30 miles from the headwaters of the Yampa River, a major tributary of the Colorado River that has 17 feet of snow or more in parts of its watershed.

“This could be a year to remember,” Mr. Struble added in a recent interview in his office as snow fell again on the high country.

No matter what happens, the snows of 2011, especially their persistence into late spring, have already made the record books.

But the West has also changed significantly since 1983, when super-snows last produced widespread flooding. From the foothills west of Denver to the scenic, narrow canyons of northern Utah, flood plains that were once wide-open spaces have been built up.

Many communities have improved their defenses, for example, by fortifying riverbanks to keep streams in place, but those antiflood bulwarks have for the most part not been tested by nature’s worst hits.

And in sharp contrast to the floods on the Mississippi River – one mighty waterway, going where it will – the Western story is fragmented, with anxiety dispersed across dozens, perhaps even hundreds, of large and small waterways that could surge individually, collectively or not at all.

In California, officials staged three days of flood training last week, running disaster scenarios and practicing the grunt work of filling sandbags and draping and tying down tarp. The state's aging levee system has long been a source of concern, with fears of large-scale failures that could leave Sacramento, the state capital, vulnerable to a Hurricane Katrina-scale flood. The anxieties are amplified this year by the deep snows in the Sierra Nevada, where some ski spots around Lake Tahoe saw more than 60 feet this season.

Read the whole story

Outdoor lights add ambiance to yards

By Susan Skorupa, Reno Gazette-Journal

Outdoor lighting has come a long way from the 60-watt incandescent lightbulb strung up over the back door.

Landscape lighting has become more efficient and effective, helping people make better use of their yards and patios.

LED low-voltage and solar lights stand out as popular options for outdoor use on decks and patios, around pools and other water features, and to highlight landscape attractions.

There are several attractive factors in outdoor lighting, said

Tom Stille, local landscape architect.

People like to light up pathways for better visibility on sidewalks and stairways to their doors or around their yards.

“Path lights … can add a lot of ambiance,” Stille said. “They don’t light the whole landscape.”

Read the whole story

Memorial Day event in Placerville

Friends of the Veterans Monument will host the 6th annual Memorial Day observance on May 30 at 11am at the El Dorado County Veterans Monument, 360 Fair Lane, Placerville.

Each year the community gathers at the El Dorado County Veterans Monument grounds on Memorial Day to honor those who have served and sacrificed for the cause of freedom.

Highlights of this year’s tribute include:

· A T-6 aircraft fly-by salute in the missing man formation to honor those who have sacrificed to preserve our freedoms

· U.S.M.C. Color Guard

· Special guest speaker: Former U.S.M.C. Maj. Gen. Douglas M. Stone, retired

· Participation of local Cub and Boy Scout troops, Marine Corps League

· Friends of the Veterans monument scholarship awards.

Opinion: Is Squaw Valley cursed?

By Cody Townsend, ESPN Action Sports

In sports and life, mythological curses are sometimes blamed for tragic chains of misfortune. For instance, when an accident in his Porsche Spyder sports car took the life of James Dean in 1955, the car then became entangled in a five-year-long series of tragedies that killed a race car driver, maimed a mechanic and brought mysterious woe to many who encountered it. The vehicle, it was said, had to be cursed.

In the freeskiing world, for the Squaw Valley community that I live in, it feels like we're driving that Porsche right now. For the past couple of years, we seem to been trapped in a vortex of misfortune – we keep losing our own people, one tragic accident at a time.

Randy Davis, a local up-and-coming freestyle skier, was killed at Squaw in an inbounds avalanche on Christmas day in 2008. We lost longtime Squaw legend Shane McConkey to a ski BASE accident in Italy in 2009. Andrew Entin, a much-loved career ski patroller, died while conducting avalanche control at Squaw in 2009. Then CR Johnson perished in an inbounds crash at Squaw Valley in 2010. Squaw's Arne Backstrom passed away in a ski mountaineering fall in Peru in 2010. And then, a couple of weeks ago, locals Kip Garre and Allison Kreutzen were killed by a backcountry avalanche in the southern Sierra Nevada mountains.

Of course, the greater freeskiing community suffered tragedies during the last few years as well – we lost the lives of pro skiers Billy Poole, Jack Hannan, John Nicolleta, Ryan Hawks,

and countless other skiers. But the sheer number of deaths from Squaw seemed to be heart-wrenchingly high. We couldn’t help but think it: Is the Squaw community cursed?

At this point, our tenets of faith – karma, justice, providence – have been torn down. We question everything. How can it be that our heroes, friends and family are being ripped away from the Squaw Valley community so methodically?

Read the whole story

Water regulators demand permits for coastal fireworks

By Tony Barboza, Los Angeles Times

Water regulators have voted to require pollution permits for coastal fireworks displays in southern Orange County and San Diego County, in what they said was the first such regulation in the nation.

Operators of seaside fireworks shows from Laguna Beach to the U.S.-Mexico border will have to pay a $1,500 annual fee, minimize the discharge of pollutants into the water and clean up shells, cardboard, fuses and other debris under the rules approved Wednesday by the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board.

The rules, which take effect in June, will largely affect displays along the coastline, but will also apply to fireworks over rivers, streams, reservoirs and lakes.

Officials said the policy is an attempt to protect bodies of water from pyrotechnic shows that scatter pollutants and

trash. The metals and chemicals that produce explosive effects and bright colors can also contaminate water and become toxic to aquatic life

“The new requirements balance the importance of public displays of fireworks as part of our national and community celebrations and the need to prevent degradation of water and sediment quality from the fallout of firework combustion residue,” David W. Gibson, the water board’s executive officer, said in a news release.

Water board officials said it was the nation’s first comprehensive policy to regulate fireworks as a pollution source subject to the federal Clean Water Act.

Read the whole story