Letter: S. Tahoe Chamber supports fireworks

Publisher's note: ***The following letter was sent to Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority Executive Director Carol Chaplin on March 26. It is reprinted with permission.***

Dear Ms. Chaplin:

I am writing on behalf of the South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce, its board of directors and membership. As you know, the South Tahoe Chamber represents many smaller family-owned businesses within the city and South Shore. The chamber supports economic growth for all segments of the South Shore economy.

The South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce wants to go on the record regarding the following:

1. Supporting the celebration of our nation's independence on July 4;

2. Supporting traditional fireworks celebration as sponsored by the LTVA;

3. Encouraging, advocating and supporting a re-energized and intensive lake and adjacent shoreline cleanup effort to ensure that after the event is over the Lake and shoreline areas are clear of debris and rubbish; and

4. Examine the feasibility for future years of alternative light display options such as laser light shows as used at many entertainment parks across the country.

The traditional July 4 event is an important expression of our nation's independence, and it is an important economic opportunity for the South Shore. I believe that the existing regional and environmental regulatory agencies have demonstrated their commitment to lake clarity and provide

appropriate oversight for this event as you documented in your Jan. 18, 2014, letter to the *Lake Tahoe News*.

Sincerely,

George Alm, president South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce

Tornado warning in El Dorado, Placer counties

A tornado warning was issued earlier this evening for west central El Dorado County and southwester Placer County.

Here is a link to a video of a funnel crowd caught by KCRA-TV.

LTWC bear given another chance in wild



This bear returns to its home in Southern California.

Photo/Provided

A bear rehabbed at Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care was released back to the Los Padres National Forest near Lebec.

The male cub was found in distress near the town of Lebec in August 2013.

“People frequently encounter young wild animals such as bears and assume they need assistance or have been orphaned,” CDFW Senior Environmental Scientist Marc Kenyon said in a statement. “In most cases, they should be left alone. Any intervention with young wildlife should be left to CDFW staff or permitted wildlife rehabilitators. This is the best way to ensure that wildlife stays in the wild.”

Upon release, the cub was given a final health checkup that included taking hair and blood samples.

STPUD on course to increase rates



STPUD board members Jim Jones, from left, Randy Vogelgesang, Eric Schafer and Kelly Sheehan on March 26. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

South Tahoe Public Utility District board members on Wednesday somewhat hamstrung future board's when it comes to allowable rate increases.

They also agreed to potential water and sewer increases that are well below what staff recommends.

"It really decreases the water line replacements. Hopefully, there is not a fire in the area where the water lines are pushed off," Paul Hughes, CFO for the district, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the three-hour meeting.

Four of the board members clearly had their minds made up about how to proceed even before staff gave its report, and the public had a chance to ask questions and make comments.

Board member Chris Cefalu, who is out of town, didn't even listen in during the March 26 discussion. He only joined the conversation via telephone when it came time for board deliberations.

He and board member Randy Vogelgesang were adamant that the staff's recommendations were too much. Board members Eric Schafer and Jim Jones believe staff is spot on, with Jones saying increases could even be higher to meet the needs of the district. Kelly Sheehan didn't say much, but leaned toward Cefalu and Vogelgesang.

In the end, the consensus was to set a maximum possible rate increase on the water side of 6.5 percent for each of the next four years with the fifth year being 5 percent; maximum possible sewer increase of 6 percent each of the next five years; and raising the base pay for those on water meters to be 80 percent of the bill, with 15 percent being based on consumption.

Staff had proposed water increases of 9.5 percent, 9 percent,

9 percent, 9 percent and 5 percent for the next five years. The other increases are what staff recommended.

Per state law the district must send to ratepayers what is called a Proposition 218 form. This informs them of the proposed maximum allowed increases. This will go out the first week of April.

Proposition 218 requires a 45-day protest period. If 50 percent plus one ratepayers were to file a protest to the proposed rate increases, the district could not go forward no matter what the board wanted to do.

It won't be until the board's June 5 meeting that a decision is actually made on what the increases, if there are any, will be. They can be less than what is proposed – including no increase. (There will also be public meetings April 17 and May 15, both at 6pm.)

What some of the board members were hung up on is this was not a vote for a specific percentage, but instead it was about a maximum allowed for the next five years.

One reason to go for the five-year Proposition 218 notice is to save money because the process is an expense, as well as to lock in revenues to pay for the completion of installing nearly 8,000 water meters.

The district has until mid-June to apply for a $21.5 million zero percent interest loan from the state that would be paid back over 20 years. The state is mandating water districts install meters by 2025.

Cefalu and Vogelgesang believe having put a higher cap on the rate increase would have made it more likely this and future boards would vote for that amount and they believe it is too much to ask ratepayers.

Schafer and Jones wanted to give this and future boards

flexibility – plus, the top percentage allows the district to accomplish goals the board has set forth with capital improvement projects.

Besides needing to install the meters, the district's main concerns are the nearly 1,500 residences that don't have water lines that provide for adequate fire suppression. While the 2007 Angora Fire was brought up multiple times and how that area had sufficient sized lines, nothing was mentioned about California's continued drought and how that could subject the area to greater danger of a wildfire. The 4-inch lines cannot pump the required 1,500 gallons per minute.

For the last 10 years, the average STPUD water bill has gone up 2 percent, and the sewer bill 2.55 percent.

When the district does its 10-year plan, which it updates every year, a 4 percent increase is forecast. This gives staff an idea of revenues so it can plan projects.

Schafer, who is the board president and has said he is not running for re-election in November, said of the 10-year document, "I think we need to start paying attention to what we put in it. That's a semi-commitment."

Because what has been going in it has not truly reflected the board's actions because rate increases have not been occurring on a regular basis.

Staff showed how water projects for the next 10 years have a price tag of $69.5 million, while the 20-year estimate is $154 million. Ultimately the cost will be more expensive as things break and need to be repaired, and as construction costs escalate because costs are also based on work that should have been done.

And it's possible after this five-year stretch rates could go higher to compensate for not having a higher rate now. That is essentially what is happening now. Staff had said 4 percent

increases were needed to keep up with capital improvement projects. Those increases didn’t materialize because of board decisions. That is why larger increases were on the table.

The third issue facing the district is $58.5 million in capital improvements are penciled out for the next 10 years on the sewer side; $130 million across 20 years.

A fire that cannot be suppressed or a sewer spill into Lake Tahoe or the Upper Truckee River will prove making upgrades per staff recommendations should have done; plugging along without incident will prove the gamble with lower rate increases was the prudent move.

Dummy Downhill tests ingenuity at Diamond Peak

The 14th annual Dummy Downhill returns to Diamond Peak on April 6.

Participants build a dummy on skis or snowboards that get launched off of a big jump, while spectators watch as the unique characters fly down the hill or crash hard.

The Dummy Downhill is open to the public and there are no registration fees. Dummies need to be at the base lodge by 11am to be judged on creativity, with the jumping and awards ceremony to follow. Prizes and certificates will be awarded for creativity, best crash, and farthest distance.

Participants may register their dummy online or by emailing the names of the team captains and dummy names to info@diamondpeak.com. Onsite registration will be available on

the day of the event from 9-11am on the Base Lodge Deck.

Incline Elementary School is participating as part of a class project to introduce kids to engineering.

LTCC classified staff about to have initial contract

Lake Tahoe Community Colleges' classified staff is about to have its first contract.

The group officially organized to establish a union in August 2011. They have been working with the college since then to create a contract.

In the first go-round discussions reached impasse regarding health and welfare, and binding arbitration.

The board of trustees discussed the contract at the March 25 meeting and is expected to approve it at the April 8 meeting. The union still needs to ratify the contract.

Health benefits starting July 1 will be capped at $17,496 a year. The district is paying 100 percent of the standard health plan for employees. Employees have the option to pay $158/month for the premium plan.

The board was against binding arbitration, believing instead elected officials should have final say regarding grievance and discipline issues.

No raises are part of the deal because the South Lake Tahoe

institution is still experiencing declining enrollment and other budgetary issues.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Tahoe locals to talk about area's history

Lake Tahoe Historical Society's second Do You Remember? program is April 15 at 7pm at the Lodge of Camp Richardson.

It will be a panel of longtime residents telling stories and answering questions about the past. Dave Borges will moderate.

Panelists include Carolyn Meiers, Jerry Johnson, Jack Martin, Del Laine, Steve James and Melba Rakow.

It is free to historical society members, otherwise it's $3.

Study: Calif. second least affordable state for renters

By Andrew Khouri, Los Angeles Times

California renters must earn more than triple the minimum wage to afford a two-bedroom apartment, underscoring a housing shortage throughout the state, a report said.

A worker earning the minimum wage – $8 per hour in California

– would have to toil away for 130 hours a week to afford a two-bedroom, the National Low Income Housing Coalition said Monday.

Across the nation, minimum wage workers can't afford a one- or two-bedroom apartment at fair market rent, the group said. The coalition's president, Sheila Crowley, said raising the federal minimum wage would ease the burden.

Read the whole story

Class available to certify contractors in BMPs

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension's 15th annual best management practices workshops for contractors and landscape designers are April 17 and 18 at Sierra Nevada College in Incline Village.

The half-day refresher course is 8am-noon on April 17, and the full-day basic workshop is 8am-4:50pm on April 18.

Best management practices are land-management and landscaping practices that control erosion and encourage runoff from rooftops and pavement to infiltrate into the ground

This year's workshops will include presentations on two new BMP site design options developed by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. These options will provide alternative ways to evaluate a property and create a site design, as the planning agency and the conservation districts may not be able to provide as many free BMP site evaluations in the future as they have in the past.

Businesses that install BMPs are listed on an installation service providers list as long as at least one employee attends and passes the course every two years. The list is online.

To register, go online. For more information, call 775.784.4848.

Acquatic invasive species subject of talk

The Lake Tahoe Aquatic Invasive Species coordination committee is putting on a talk to highlight aquatic invasive species control and prevention efforts in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The event is May 22 from 5:30-7:30pm.

It is at Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences, 291 Country Club Drive, Incline Village.