Homeland Security wants to track drivers

By Josh Hicks, Washington Post

The Department of Homeland Security plans to build a national database that would gather information from license-plate readers that scan every vehicle crossing their paths, according to a solicitation last week from the agency.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement would use the technology to help locate and arrest "absconders and criminal aliens," reducing surveillance hours and enhancing officer safety, according to the request.

License-plate readers, which automatically record information on all vehicles that cross their paths instead of just suspect vehicles, are controversial among privacy advocates. The American Civil Liberties Union issued a report last year criticizing the increased use of such devices, saying they collect vast amounts of data on innocent individuals and could be used for abusive tracking and targeting.

Read the whole story

Report: Community colleges good for taxpayers

By Katherine Mangan, Chronicle of Higher Education

Community-college graduates receive nearly $5 in benefits for every dollar they spend on their education, while the return

to taxpayers is almost six to one, according to a report released on Tuesday that measures not only graduates' higher earning power but also their healthier lifestyles.

The report, "Where Value Meets Values: The Economic Impact of Community Colleges," seeks to quantify what happens when community colleges provide employers with skilled workers, the economy with consumers, and graduates with jobs along with better health and well-being.

The 88-page report was prepared by Economic Modeling Specialists International for the American Association of Community Colleges.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe to finance Harrison Avenue upgrades



This is what Harrison Avenue at Modesto Avenue will look like by the end of the year. Artists rendering/Design Workshop

By Kathryn Reed

Funky, hodgepodge, outdated. Those are just some of the descriptions people use to describe the architecture along Harrison Avenue in South Lake Tahoe.

And while it's not a mandate that the 19 property owners spruce up their Highway 50 frontage buildings, some are in the planning stages to do just that. With the Feb. 18 approval by the City Council to go forward with the Harrison Avenue project after 19 years of planning, property owners are getting more serious.

John Cefalu, who owns the Globin Building that houses the Al Tahoe Laundry Center, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting that he has preliminary designs done. He was waiting for the council to stop talking and act on Harrison's future before he committed more resources. That building is more than 50 years old.

Cefalu’s goal is to coordinate the improvements to his structure to coincide with the street improvements.

On Tuesday the council agreed to finance $3 million over 15 years to compensate for the funding gap that was created when the lowest bid of $4,806,307 came in 13 percent higher than the engineer’s estimates. One of the reasons estimates were so off is that they were more than a year old.

When construction support and contingency funds are added, the actual total cost comes to $5,688,920. That doesn’t include the $720,074 that has been spent on design and engineering.

Sierra Nevada Construction out of Sparks was the low bidder. Because federal dollars are in part funding the project the city’s rule to give preference to local contractors was superseded.

The city has $2,878,115 in cash to go forward. That comes primarily from a $1.5 million certificate of participation bond the city took out in 2012. (The total bond was $5 million; with $1.5 million allocated to Harrison.) The rest is from federal agencies and $79,000 from South Tahoe Public Utility District. (STPUD can pay to have utilities relocated or do the work itself.)

This leaves a gap of $2,810,805. The city is seeking to finance slightly more than that amount to build in a cushion or in case add-ons are sought.



Harrison Avenue will get a multi-million dollar face lift this summer. Photo/LTN file

The council members on Tuesday approved going into debt for Harrison, saying the project will never get less expensive, they don't want to tie up reserves, and it's time to spend money to improve the city.

Property owners in the area have created a special district and will be paying $971,000 of the total project. A handful of property owners have paid the first installment that is now overdue. Some were waiting to give the city money after the city committed in earnest to do the project.

To pay back the estimated $294,000 annual debt on the bond the city could use the $100,000 a year it will be getting from property owners for the next 20 years. There is also an estimated $970,000 budget surplus that has not been allocated that could be used. There is also parking revenue, assuming there is a parking program. Ironically, the parking program brings in about the same amount of money the bond debt will be.

The one thing the council could not do Tuesday was award the contract to Sierra Nevada Construction. This is because legally the city must have the cash in hand to do so. That should occur within a month.

Mitch Grayson, superintendent with SNC, said his firm is willing to go forward with the assumption it has the job and funding will be secured.

The goal is to start May 1 and be done by the end of the construction season. Minor improvements may carry over into 2015.

The plans call for a complete overhaul along Harrison Avenue

between Los Angeles and San Jose avenues, going back to Riverside Avenue.

A class 1 bike trail will go along Harrison from Los Angeles, down Modesto Avenue, along Riverside, up San Jose and connect to the trail at Lakeview Commons.

Improvements will be made at the triangular parking lot near the boat launch. A new parking lot will go in along Modesto Avenue at the vacant lot across from Sno-Flake Drive-In.

Councilwoman JoAnn Conner asked whether that lot would be paid or free.

City Manager Nancy Kerry said free. She added the area will need a parking management plan so people are limited to how long they park. This will lessen the likelihood of people using those spaces for beach parking and taking spots away from customers of area businesses.

Some of the streets will be one-way to improve traffic flow and better accommodate parking. All of the streets will be completely redone. Right now they all are rated an F.

Landscaping will also be incorporated.

Overhead lights will be installed along Harrison Avenue and the side streets to complement what is already on Highway 50 and Pioneer Trail. On Riverside the lights will be closer to the ground so as not to bother residents.

A future expense is the operating and maintenance costs. Sarah Hussong-Johnson, deputy public works director, said lighting, parking lot upkeep and snow removal of the bike trail will cost the city. Councilwoman Brooke Laine asked her to come back with what those annual expenses are estimated to be.

Letter: Time for Meyers to speak out

To the community,

Much a do about nothing?

Then why did our county supervisor write this letter to [Sen. Dianne] Feinstein back in July supporting the One Globe/Hub One Project? Is “Hub Living” really the neatest thing since peanut butter?

Personally, I’ve grown out of living with my bicycle in the living room and snow tires under my bed. I like my garage. I like my back yard, too. I guess, overall, I like my freedom.

Imagine having to move into a multi-storied Hub Structure, where Hub One controls the heat, water, sewer, lights, food, transportation, telephone, television, email and computer data? Sort of goes against the grain. Now imagine how much money this One company will be collecting for those services. Globe One claims to be a “green” developer. They’ll be green all right, all the way to the bank. Besides, if I wanted to live in small, cramped space above a parking garage, I’d move to New York.

I live and work in Meyers because Meyers is great. Clean, open areas, beautiful mountains, great neighbors and friends, and while growth is good, inappropriate growth is not. This Hub One “megapolitan” just isn’t right for Meyers.

We can stop this train wreck, please read the attached letter. Check out the facts.

Angela Olson, Meyers

Tour combines skiing, food and fund raising

For about two hours starting at 12:30pm the meadow above Tahoe Cross Country Ski Area is filled with hungry gliders and striders, leisurely traveling around a free-form food course. No need to be an expert skier to participate. Beginners may rent skis or snowshoes at the ski shop inside the lodge.

The 13th annual Gourmet Ski Tour is March 9.

Chefs from Bridgetender, Christy Hill, Jakes on the Lake, Lanza's, Mamasake, Men Wielding Fire, Chef Ron, Sugar Pine Cakery, Sunnyside, Tahoe House Bakery, Uncommon Kitchen, and Wolfdale's will creating various concoctions.

Besides the food, there will be wine tasting by Truckee River Winery, beer tasting by Deschutes Brewery, and coffee from Coffee Connexion.

Following the feast, Tahoe Cross Country is featuring music by Sneaky Creatures. When the band takes a break the Wild, Wild, Wild West-themed costume contest will be judged.

The Gourmet Ski Tour is the major fundraiser for the Tahoe Cross Country Ski Education Foundation.

Tickets are $40. Children under 13 may eat free at the mobile barbecue. For more information, call (530) 583.5475 or email ski@tahoexc.org.

Parents not always choosing vaccinations for kids

By Tasneem Raja and Chris Mooney, Mother Jones

It’s easy to find bad information about the safety of vaccines on the Internet. That’s, well, the Internet. But what’s scarier is that in many states, parents who buy into those myths can easily opt out of immunizing their children. In some cases, it’s no harder than checking a box on a school form saying that vaccines are against their “personal beliefs.”

In a 2012 study of vaccine exemption policies across the country, a team of researchers led by Saad Omer, a professor of public health at Emory University, found that of the 20 states that allowed personal belief exemptions for enrollment in a public school or child-care program, less than a third made it “difficult” to do so (for instance, by making parents re-apply for one each year, explain their beliefs in writing, or get a notarized letter of approval from a health care provider).

In the nine “easy” states identified in the study, the rules required only signing a form. Indeed, Omer suspects that some parents sign vaccine exemption forms not because they actually hold anti-vaccine beliefs, but simply because it’s easier than juggling the doctors’ appointments, missed work, and other inconveniences of getting kids vaccinated.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Tahoe-Douglas Rotary Club's St. Patrick's Day celebration is March 14 from 6-10pm at Harrah's Lake Tahoe. Call 800.576.8372 or email spdc@tdrotary.com to buy a $65 ticket.

• South Tahoe High grad Thomas Smith will be playing trumpet when the UCLA marching band opens the 24th season of "The Amazing Race" on Feb. 23.

• The Lake Tahoe Marathon will be two weeks earlier this year. The dates are Sept 12-14.

• Spanish artist Rafael Lopez's Rite of Passage is being shown in three art galleries at Western Nevada College in Carson City through March 21.

• Beginning the first week of March and continuing into April, staff from the Nevada Division of Water Resources will be measuring groundwater levels in wells throughout various hydrographic basins in the state. Contact Mark Beutner at (775) 684.2821 for more information.

Garden tour features 8 West Slope abodes

Assistance League of Sierra Foothills fifth annual Gardens of the Hills Tour will provide entrance to eight distinctive

yards, each providing a glimpse into the passion the homeowners have put into creating their personal sanctuary.

The event is May 3-4 from 10am-5pm.

Homes are in El Dorado Hills and Shingle Springs.

Tickets are $25 for adults and $10 for children under 12. For tickets and more info, email pat@pava.com.

‘Storm over Everest’ to be shown in S. Tahoe

Lake of the Sky Outfitters will be airing “Storm over Everest” on Feb. 28 at 7pm.

The move is the story of the 1996 tragedy on Mt. Everest.

There is limited seating for the free movie. RSVP to (530) 541-1027.

The address is 1023 Emerald Bay Road, South Lake Tahoe.

Brown puts deep imprint on California judiciary

By Howard Mintz, San Jose Mercury News

As he prepares to fill a surprise opening on the California

Supreme Court, Gov. Jerry Brown’s track record of appointing judges strongly points toward a consistent theme – scouring the legal ranks for candidates with some intellectual firepower who might add diversity to the nation’s largest judiciary.

Justice Joyce Kennard’s unexpected announcement this month that she will retire in April has given Brown a chance to name his second Supreme Court justice in his latest go-round as governor, a clear opportunity to heavily influence a court that has tilted conservative since he left office in 1983.

A review of Brown’s 164 judicial appointments since 2011 paints a portrait of a Democratic governor trying to break new ground on the bench without taking the risks he took back in his first tenure, notably his ill-fated appointment of former Chief Justice Rose Bird, ousted by voters in 1986.

Read the whole story