Snow removal fee in South Tahoe may increase

By Kathryn Reed

It will be up to voters if snow removal fees double in South Lake Tahoe.

The City Council on Sept. 17 unanimously agreed to have staff draw up a ballot initiative for 2014 that would increase the fee from $20 to $40.

“The equipment is desperately in need of upgrades,” City Attorney Tom Watson told the council.

The average age of the fleet is 19, with the oldest piece of equipment being a 43-year-old blower.



South Tahoe voters will be asked in 2014 to tax themselves to replace snow removal equipment. Photo/LTN file

The proposal brought forward Tuesday was for the additional fee to cover equipment, maintenance and operations.

“The spirit of the original ordinance was to fund equipment,” Councilman Hal Cole said. “I’d rather see a ballot measure for

equipment and maintenance than operations.”

His colleagues all agreed – they don’t want the tax to go for operations.

“It’s $20 a year. I can’t believe many people in the community wouldn’t see the need for it,” Councilwoman JoAnn Conner said. “This is a simple thing. We need better equipment.”

In saying this, she was also against forming a subcommittee at this early stage to deal with public outreach.

Councilwoman Brooke Laine pointed out if it were such a simple thing, then the 2005 ballot initiative would have passed.

That year the proposed increase failed with 54.3 percent of the voters against it. Like all tax initiatives, it will take two-thirds of the voters for it to pass. That increase would have made the original 1989 assessment $40 per year per parcel in the city limits.

The 2014 proposal is a separate $20 tax that would likely increase based on inflation. For that to happen, it needs to be written into the ballot measure. It would leave the current $20 assessment in place.

“… while today’s capital costs are covered by the 1989 assessment, there are no available resources for capital reserve for equipment replacement,” Watson wrote in his staff report. “Without additional revenue, future capital purchases will have to be funded out of reserves, new debt or the general fund.”

If passed, the measure would bring in about $440,000 a year from the nearly 11,000 parcels that would be paying $40/year.

Hike benefits two South Shore housing groups

The annual Hike for Housing fundraiser to support South Lake Tahoe Habitat for Housing and Saint Joseph Community Land Trust is Sept. 21 from 9am-1pm at the Lam Watah Trail.

Meet at 1 Elks Point Road in Round Hill.

Registration is $25 per family or $15 for an individual. Register and park for free at Our Lady of Tahoe Catholic Church off Elks Point Road.

Raffle tickets will be available for purchase at the registration site.

This is a paved two-mile trail with several side trails for those who wish to extend the mileage. The trail is dog and bike friendly.

For more information, call (530) 541.4654 or (530) 541.8930.

Blood drive in South Lake Tahoe

BloodSource will have a blood drive in South Lake Tahoe on Oct. 7 from noon-6pm.

Blood drive participants will receive a parking validation for Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel.

The blood drive is sponsored by the Barton Memorial Hospital Auxiliary.

Walk-ins are welcoem. Donors must weigh at least 110 pounds, be at least 17 years old (16 with a signed BloodSource Parental consent form) and be generally healthy. There is no upper age limit for blood donations. Donors must bring a photo ID and should drink plenty of fluids before donating.

For more information, call Larry Coffman at (530) 577.0328. For donor eligibility questions, call BloodSource at 800.995.4420.

Car wash benefits STHS drama-music programs

South Tahoe High School Performing Arts Booster Association presents “A Car Wash Fundraiser” on Sept. 21 from 10am-3pm.

This is a one-off performance by students of the drama, choral and music departments to raise money to help support the performing arts at STHS, including this year’s production of “Young Frankenstein”.

Come by 1154 Emerald Bay Road (Kelly Shanahan’s office, between Bert’s Cafe and Lake Tahoe Pizza).

Donations of all sizes will be accepted.

A song and dance may be included, too.

Learn how to use the Census website

Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce and the U.S. Census Bureau are teaming up to present two workshops focusing on how to navigate through the Census website and the American FactFinder website.

The workshops will be Sept. 26 in the chamber Conference Room at 169 Highway 50, Stateline.

Bring a laptop to participate.

Census Workshop for Business Owners begins at 9am, and Census Workshop for Grant Writers begins at 1pm.

Space is limited; register in advance online.

S. Lake Tahoe changes arts-crafts policy – again

By Kathryn Reed

In a heated debate Tuesday that included council members making snide remarks at one another, the regulations involving arts and crafts fairs in South Lake Tahoe was changed for the second time this month.

On a 3-2 vote the City Council decided to allow 10 arts and crafts fairs in 2014 and eight in 2015. What the number will be beyond that was not discussed.

At the Sept. 3 council meeting the five had agreed to change the number of these annual events from 12 to four.

On Sept. 17, with the council chambers full of arts and nonprofit advocates, the council changed its mind. Councilmembers Angela Swanson and Brooke Laine wanted to stick with the four weekends. Their contention is that it is time for the city to start looking better and less junky with all the tents cluttering town every summer weekend.

Swanson is also concerned the promoter does not have to donate to nonprofits because of a U.S. Supreme Court case. The promoter of past events has verbally committed to continuing donations, but there is no guarantee he will get all the fairs or that he will continue to do them.

Councilmember Hal Cole's main problem is with the transient shows taking money out of brick and mortar establishments, as well as perceived lack of sales tax collected.

Councilmembers Tom Davis and JoAnn Conner believe the arts and crafts fairs are good for the economy and put money in nonprofits' coffers.

The city has a number of regulations on the books that allow for different types of arts and crafts events. The main way is through the ordinance that was amended this week. Nine such vendors may be part of another event where the main emphasis is not crafts. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency allows special event districts – such as Heavenly Village and Ski Run Boulevard. These districts have other guidelines to follow beyond the contentious city ordinance.

Beyond the change in the number of arts and crafts events that will be allowed, the city agreed to work with those who want to have special events at their sites to see how best to make it beneficial for everyone.

In other action:

• The council unanimously approved the 2013-14 budget that takes effect Oct. 1.

• A tentative agreement was reached regarding the MV Transportation case. Details will be announced at the Oct. 1 meeting when the council is scheduled to ratify the settlement.

• City Manager Nancy Kerry was given her review. “She has done a wonderful job,” Mayor Tom Davis told *Lake Tahoe News*. Her initial contract from June 2012 was for three years. Her new contract, which will be voted on at the Oct. 1 meeting, has the contract expiring in 5½ years. It moves the expiration and review to the spring so an election does not interfere with the process. Kerry would not allow discussion of a raise. If she were to be terminated, she would receive nine months severance instead of six, which is what was in the original contract.

Opinion: Privacy laws not adequate in age of Internet

By Jamie Court

Two federal courts in California recently took up the question of whether invasion of privacy laws should apply to unauthorized opening of email, in one case, and interception of unencrypted home WiFi communications in another.

Wiretapping law stood the test against “Wi-spying” last week. A panel of Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals judges held that data transmitted over a WiFi network is protected because it is not as easily accessible as a radio communication and

intercepting it takes technical stealth akin to tapping a telephone.

The question of whether reading and collecting the contents of our emails meets the wiretapping standard remains unanswered.

What's notable is that the defendant in these cases was not the National Security Agency or a rogue "war driver," techies who cruise neighborhoods with equipment to suck up unencrypted data, but the largest company on the Internet: Google.

Google's argument in both cases was essentially the same: Invasion of privacy laws don't apply online.

The Wi-spy case sprung from revelations that Google's Street View cars not only were photographing the roads they traveled but were also collecting "payload" data – including emails, documents, photos, passwords and other private information – transmitted over WiFi networks as the cars drove by.

Google's defense against a class-action lawsuit (which the consumer group I run is co-counsel in) alleging millions of violations of the wiretapping laws was basically "anybody can do it," so it's not wiretapping.

The court didn't buy it, finding that Google engineers' knowledge and values didn't reflect the public's. "Members of the general public do not typically mistakenly intercept, store and decode data transmitted by other devices on the network," the judges said.

In the email case, Google argues that those who e-mail Gmail users, and have their email contents read and scanned by Google for marketing purposes, "have no legitimate expectation of privacy."

"Just as a sender of a letter to a business colleague cannot be surprised that the recipient's assistant opens the letter, people who use Web-based email today cannot be surprised if

their emails are processed by the recipient's (e-mail provider) in the course of delivery," Google's lawyers stated in their brief.

The statements caused a big public backlash against Google because we think of Google as the post office, not an executive's assistant. We don't expect the postmaster to read our mail, particularly when we don't use a Gmail account and are simply emailing to Gmailers.

The overarching problem is companies with the power and wealth of Google and Facebook will continue to push the envelope of our telephonic privacy laws because they have yet to be updated for the Internet Age.

Google argued in the Gmail case that telephone lines are not the same as the Internet, and the invasion of privacy laws simply don't apply.

Dozens of states and several countries have fined or settled with Google for the Wi-spy incident, but the millions of dollars are a slap on the wrist to a $150 billion company. The $25,000 Google was fined by the Federal Communications Commission for obstructing its investigation of the Wi-spy scandal is probably less than the weekly cappuccino bill at the Googleplex.

California's Constitution contains an "inalienable right" to privacy in Article 1, but the legislative session that ended Friday produced little in the way of privacy protections, despite scandals de jour.

What's needed now more than ever is an unequivocal do-not-track-online right.

All the major Internet browsers now allow us to send a do-not-track-me signal, but very, very few websites and Internet systems respect it. Google analytics and its advertising networks, for example, track us as we surf online to market us

regardless of the signals we send.

That’s why when you search for a Pottery Barn lamp, the advertisement for it seems to be stalking you at the next sites you visit.

A recent Pew study reaffirms that the public overwhelmingly wants the right to be anonymous on the Internet. But the White House clearly has no interest in that, given its vigorous defense of the NSA.

In California, the best Sacramento could muster this year is a right to be told whether your do-not-track signal is being respected – AB370, which is awaiting the governor’s signature.

More disclosure about the privacy rights we don’t have is simply not enough for a public in an age of driverless cars, wired refrigerators and wearable devices like Google Glass, which can surreptitiously video record us. Our current privacy laws can only stretch so far, and the Internet is quickly colonizing all the space around us.

A ballot measure is now the public’s only hope to win the right to privacy online and to not be tracked. If we don’t set the boundaries soon, we will quickly lose control over all the personal information in our life, from what we eat, to where we drive, to when we get seen in someone else’s Glass. And as we all know, online and off, information is power.

Jamie Court is president of Consumer Watchdog, a nonprofit nonpartisan public interest group in Santa Monica. He is drafting a do-not-track-online measure for the November 2014 ballot.

Rahlves’ Banzai Tour sets 2014 dates

The 2014 Rahlves’ Banzai Tour will stop at four Lake Tahoe resorts this winter.

From Feb. 8 through March 16 the tour will be at Kirkwood Mountain Resort, Squaw Valley, Alpine Meadows, and finishing with the finals and super final at Sugar Bowl Resort.

“There is no other race like this in the world,” Daron Rahlves, former World Champion, X-Games Champ, four-time Olympian, Sugar Bowl Resort ambassador, and tour founder said in a statement. “What’s so unique about the Banzai is that everyday rippers line up against pro-level athletes to find out what they’re made of, battle for Rahlves’ Banzai titles, and an $80,000 purse. When the gate drops, it’s on as four competitors go head-to-head in a top to bottom race over natural terrain.”

Last year’s champs Johnny Bochenek, Shannon Rahlves, Casey Lucas, and Kyle Coxon will have tough competition in defending their titles. From everyday rippers representing their home resorts, to skiers/boarders of all levels coming out for a fun and competitive experience, to competitors making a name for themselves on other tours in racing, ski cross and big mountain—all will converge for the high-speed action at each 2014 RBT stop.

The dates are:

Kirkwood Mountain – Feb. 8-9

Squaw Valley – Feb. 15-16

Alpine Meadows – March 8-9

Sugar Bowl – March 15-19.

Triathlon creator to give talk in Tahoe City

One of the four men who came up with the concept of the modern triathlon will be speaking Thursday night in Tahoe City.

Dan Hendrickson will be talking Sept. 19 at 6:30pm at the Gatekeeper's Museum. A former Navy Seal, Hendrickson was one of four friends who originally came up with the idea of the triathlon. The concept was created with the intention of proving which athletes were more fit: swimmers or runners? The first triathlon was in San Diego in September 1974.

This Third Thursday Speaker Series event is free for North Lake Tahoe Historical Society members. A $10 donation is suggested for non-members.

Doors open at 6pm with a no-host bar.

For more information, call (530) 583.1762.

Motorists kill 2 bears near Tahoe

Two bears have died since bear hunting season started in Nevada on Sunday, but not by a gun.

Both were killed by vehicles.

The Nevada Department of Wildlife said a cub was killed in Incline Village and 5-year-old female was hit in Verdi.

According to the Associated Press, 45 tags have been issued. Bear season lasts until Dec. 31 or when 20 bears have been taken by hunters.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report