S. Lake Tahoe budget includes layoffs, using reserves

By Kathryn Reed

Deficit spending is continuing in South Lake Tahoe for another year and may be what happens in 2013-14, too.

The budget the City Council is expected to approve Sept. 18 includes $700,000 from unassigned excess reserves. And while the budget, which goes into effect Oct. 1, is balanced per state law, the city is not living within its means because it has to take from reserves. It would be like the average person dipping into savings to pay routine monthly bills.

"We are solving the budget for today, but we are on notice for tomorrow because we still have problems," City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

As of today, it is estimated the 2013-14 budget shortfall will be $1.5 million.

To help balance the budget for the coming fiscal year Kerry has reorganized city staff to the savings of $450,000. This includes more layoffs.

Jobs being eliminated as of the end of the calendar year are the risk manager, buyer and street superintendent. The law clerk position will not be funded past May 31, 2013. The director for engineering position goes away as soon as the person who has it goes on maternity leave, which is expected later this fall.

Sarah Hussong-Johnson, who is the director of engineering, is

expected to return in 2013 from leave to be a part-time city engineer as well as deputy public works director.

Positions that will remain on the books, but will not be funded for now are an IT technician, assistant to city manager and community services director.

“Every position is critical, but which can we do in a different way?” is how Kerry said she approached the cuts. She also reiterated what she has said in public – that with staff being cut by 30 percent in the last few years, not everything that got done in the past will get done or at least not as quickly.

“Quality core services” is now the mantra of the city.

In the reorganization, though, some new positions are being created. Part of this has to do with separating public works from community services.

New positions include a public works director who is expected to be hired by Jan. 15. An external search will be conducted for that job.

Kerry met with public works employees who for the most part came up with the plan. They will be broken into streets, engineering, fleet, capital improvement, facilities, and stormwater.

“Not a single one asked for something for themselves. Everyone said they are concerned about the public,” Kerry said.

Better coordination between the entities encompassing public works will be worked on. Cross training in jobs and creating the opportunity for career advancement should be the end result of some of the changes.

Hussong-Johnson’s job is new. It falls under public works.

A community service manager to oversee parks and recreation

will be hired the latter part of January. It’s possible that person could come from within the city ranks.

Funding for a paralegal is being allocated for January as well. That person has administrative qualities that a law clerk doesn’t usually have.

The transient occupancy tax auditor will be part time, no benefits. The position is expected to pay for itself based on finding vacation rentals that are not paying their taxes.

In the budget is funding for a deputy public safety director who would be hired mid-year at a cost of about $200,000 a year – which includes salary and benefits. This person would be second in command to Police-Fire Chief Brian Uhler, but is expected to spend 80 percent of the time at the firehouse.

(Uhler’s title is changing to public safety director.)

A year ago, the three battalion chief positions were eliminated. Also in 2011, the fire chief was forced out. That left the rank of captain to oversee fire and medical calls. It’s not working.

That is why more command structure is needed and the closing of a fire station is being discussed. The results of the multiday closure of Station 2 have not been released and it’s not known if this will happen again or become a permanent situation.

It’s possible the deputy public safety director position would not be needed if the city and Lake Valley Fire Protection District settle on a merger or consolidation of the two departments. That decision may not come for another four months as the two agencies negotiate.

Kerry has asked the city fire crew to think even bigger by defining what world-class fire protection looks like on the South Shore. They are supposed to get back to her with an

answer.

Money ($25,000) is also in the budget for additional part-time seasonal employees who will mostly work at Lakeview Commons and remove snow on sidewalks.

An ongoing savings to the city will be that as of Oct. 1 every city employee will be paying his or her full share of the PERS contribution. That is a savings of about $1 million this year for South Lake Tahoe.

While the city does have a systemic budget shortfall, sales tax and hotel tax numbers are beginning to show some life. Sales tax is up 8 percent since 2010, while TOT is 6 percent higher than two years ago. The city is projecting a 2½ percent increase in TOT in the 2012-13 budget.

Property tax is flat and remains a concern.

Kerry praised the council of 2003-04 for creating a 25 percent reserve. At that time it was zero. It grew to $14 million by 2007 and will be at $9.1 million if the 2012-13 budget is approved. And that figure would be more than 25 percent by $2.1 million. That is why the $700,000 being used to balance the budget is called unassigned excess reserves.

Kerry has studied South Tahoe's budgets for the last 30 years. The common theme is spending during good times – especially on staff, then slashing during bad times.

"What we need to do when things get better is continue the reserve. We need to not spend money on staff, but on the community," Kerry said. She wants to put things in the ground, create programs – use taxpayer money on taxpayers. But she also thinks adding to the reserves in really good times is smart business so when it cycles around to the lean times the cuts are more balanced and less painful for staff and residents.

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Note: All of these changes are dependent on the council approving them Tuesday. The Sept. 18 meeting is at 9am at Lake Tahoe Airport.

Fundraiser will help land trust buy Royal Gorge

Truckee Donner Land Trust must have $11.25 million by Dec. 20 to purchase Royal Gorge.

The acquisition of Royal Gorge properties means access to 3,000 acres of open space, which comprises much of the historic Donner Summit area. The area offers cross-country skiing, birding, appreciation of history, hiking, biking, wildflower and wildlife observation.

A “mystery” location has been chosen for a special Sept. 23 concert to benefit the Truckee Donner Land Trust for the acquisition of Royal Gorge.

Featured will be Rootstock Percussion, San Francisco Bay Area musicians Christopher Rowe, Daniel Kennedy and Loren Mach, who specialize in 20th century percussion repertoire. After a brief intermission, the audience will be treated to the Sacramento Philharmonic Brass Ensemble with principal trumpet James Rodseth, trumpet Michael Meeks, principal trombone Joel Elias and others from the Sacramento Philharmonic Orchestra.

The concert will be followed by a wine and hors d'oeuvres reception at Sugar Bowl's Lake Mary Cabin. Special wines and food will be sampled; participating restaurant sponsors are Moody's, Dragonfly, Sugar Bowl, Cottonwood and The Summit Restaurant. Wines will be offered by the Pour House, Dave Lose and Soda Springs General Store.

The Donner Summit Area Association in collaboration with the Donner Summit Historical Society, Sugar Bowl and Donner Ski Ranch are hosting the event.

Suggested minimum donation is $50. RSVP is required by Sept. 15. Contact Sugar Bowl through Thursday at (530) 426.6742 and Friday through Sunday at (530) 426.6740.

Meet at the Donner Ski Ranch parking lot at 1:30pm on Sept. 23; the concert will begin promptly at 2pm. Comfortable walking shoes are advisable.

DiMatteo released from jail

By Kathryn Reed

Gino DiMatteo on Sept. 12 was released from El Dorado County jail in Placerville on bail.

Ted Long is DiMatteo's attorney of record. He is working with the Woelfel Law Firm in South Lake Tahoe. Rob Woelfel represented DiMatteo in court Wednesday because Long was out of town, however he was not immediately available for comment.

DiMatteo was arrested Aug. 31 on multiple drug charges and bribery. He has pleaded not guilty to all counts.



Gino
DiMatteo

DiMatteo until earlier this summer ran a medical marijuana dispensary in town. However, a felon was not supposed to ever be able to open such a business in South Lake Tahoe.

South Lake Tahoe officials said a background check, including fingerprints, was done on DiMatteo but nothing surfaced that would have stopped the process.

Even though those records should go back forever, DiMatteo's 1999 weapons conviction did not surface. This could in part be because DiMatteo also goes by Sergio Franco Ottomanelli and this was not known at the time.

The form DiMatteo had to fill out with the city asked if he had been convicted of a crime in the last 10 years. It did not ask if he went by any other names.

South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman Angela Swanson is the elected official the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office says DiMatteo bribed. She has not been charged with any crime.

Swanson is not returning calls. Neither is James Clinchard, the El Dorado County deputy district attorney prosecuting the case.

Californians face rival tax measures that involve school funding

By Brooks Barnes, New York Times

LOS ANGELES – First came a competing save-our-schools ballot initiative, backed by a wealthy lawyer who proved more persistent than Gov. Jerry Brown had hoped. Then came a summer of minor financial embarrassments that handed Brown's opponents a narrative to use against him.



Now comes a nagging question: Against that backdrop, is Brown's $8-billion-a-year proposed tax increase in trouble?

On Nov. 6, California voters will face their usual thicket of ballot measures, 11 in all this time around, ranging from a further crackdown on human trafficking to the mandatory labeling of genetically engineered food. But the most prominent by far is a budget-easing measure being pushed by Brown, who wants voters to approve tax increases to head off even more cuts to the state's already decimated education system – a loss would automatically set off about $5.5 billion in cuts from public schools and $500 million from the state's public colleges.

Proposition 30, as the measure is called, would increase statewide sales taxes by one-fourth of a cent and impose an income tax surcharge on Californians who earn more than $250,000 annually. The sales tax increase would expire after four years, and the income tax component would last for seven years. Some of the new money would go to public safety

programs, like the supervision of parolees.

Stepping up his campaign for the initiative on Aug. 15, Mr. Brown, 74, framed his argument in biblical terms, telling a crowd gathered at a Sacramento high school, “To those who much has been given, much will be required,” a reference to the Gospel of Luke. The week before last, campaigning in San Diego, he said that students would see “real suffering” if voters rejected the plan.

A defeat could have consequences for the state and for Brown even beyond forcing deeper cuts in a school system that already ranks 47th in the nation in per-pupil spending. So strenuously has the governor pushed the measure, and so closely has he become linked to it, that a defeat would most likely curb his influence, and might even invite a primary challenge from a younger generation of Democrats. As Brown approaches the end of his career, his broader legacy is also in play.

“This initiative has been defined as seminal to his governorship,” said Dan Schnur, director of the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at USC.

But Proposition 30, supported by California’s teachers’ unions, has run into two snags, both of which are out of Brown’s control.

One is a rival education measure, Proposition 38, which is backed by Molly Munger, a civil rights lawyer who is the daughter of Charles Munger, the billionaire vice chairman of Berkshire Hathaway. Munger’s initiative would raise income taxes on nearly all wage earners, although wealthy Californians would bear most of the burden.

Her measure would raise about $10 billion a year, with the bulk going to schools and some going to pay down state debt. It would expire after 12 years and is supported by the California State PTA.

Brown made various attempts to eliminate competing ballot measures; some political experts say multiple tax-related measures could confuse voters, or at least make them weary of tax issues. But Munger refused to back off, and she has so far poured $19 million into her campaign. “There’s room for more than one idea about how to fix our schools, and on a topic this important, voters deserve a chance to choose,” Munger said in an email.

Nathan Ballard, a spokesman for Proposition 38, added, “Our TV campaign, focused on making sure voters know Prop. 38 is the only one that sends money directly to schools, will now start rolling out aggressively.”

Read the whole story

Bike trail work temporarily impacts Lam Watah parking

The Lam Watah Trailhead parking lot on Kahle Drive in Stateline is off-limits through Oct. 15.

A contractor for the Tahoe Transportation District will be completing a number of improvements, including grading the trail from the Lam Watah boardwalk to the current parking lot, grading for trail parking lot expansion and restroom construction. This is all part of the Stateline-to-Stateline bike trail.

Lam Watah Trail remains open, with a slight detour. Alternate parking is available in the Douglas County parking lots located on the south side of Highway 50 and Kahle Drive.

When completed, the Lam Watah Trailhead parking will be increased from nine spaces to 20 (with one space reserved for people with disabilities). New amenities will eventually include an additional informational kiosk, two picnic tables, a bear-proof trash container, and bicycle racks, in addition to the restroom.

Nevada Department of Transportation, Nevada Division of State Lands, Lake Tahoe License Plate Funds, and Federal Recreation and Trails Funds are funding the project.

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4 EDSO cars vandalized in Tahoe

Four El Dorado County sheriff' vehicles were spray painted with graffiti while parked at the South Lake Tahoe substation Tuesday night.

"Some of the moniker names appear to be gang related. We assume it's local kids," Lt. Pete Van Arnum told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Although this occurred on Sept. 11 – a day most Americans pay tribute to law enforcement and firefighters, Van Arnum has no reason to believe the date played a role in the timing of the vandalism. However, anti law enforcement profanity was written on the vehicles.

The crime occurred between 10pm and 11:30pm.

Red paint was used to damage the vehicles. The vehicles were cleaned up Wednesday, but some to the detail now needs to be fixed. So far, the damage is estimated at $500.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

League’s Stewardship Day at Tahoe Paradise park

Hundreds of Lake Tahoe Basin community members will help improve forest health at the League to Save Lake Tahoe’s 15th annual Tahoe Forest Stewardship Day on Sept. 29 at Tahoe Paradise Park in Meyers.

The League welcomes volunteers of all ages and abilities.

This year the Stewardship Day partner is the Tahoe Paradise Resort Improvement District. The focus will be on forest fuels reduction, trail restoration, river restoration, native species plantings, and educational outreach. The event will also include a volunteer appreciation lunch, sponsored by Nature’s Bakery, with a special guest speaker from the Sugar Pine Foundation.

All volunteers should wear sturdy shoes and long pants, and bring a water bottle and snack. Tools are provided, but volunteers who already have work gloves, hardhats, rakes, hand-saws, loppers, and shovels are encouraged to bring them. Do not bring axes or chain saws.

For more information or to sign-up, contact Flavia Sordelet at (530) 541.5388 or events@keeptahoeblue.org. Registration is required.

Derby Dames wrap up season Saturday

The final bout of the season for the Tahoe Derby Dames is at Bijou Community Park on Sept. 15.

It will be a double-header, with doors opening at 2pm and the bout at 3pm.

Tahoe Green Team vs. The Grim Reap-Hers will be followed by the Super Hero Smash. This is where Reno and Tahoe's finest derby athletes square off – pitting good against evil, starting at 5pm.

Cost is $12 at the door, with kids 10 and under free. Attendees are encouraged to dress up and participate in the Super Hero costume contest.

Political parties become bilingual to attract Hispanic voters

By Padmananda Rama, NPR

If you grew up in a bilingual Hispanic household, listening to the Democratic and Republican conventions may have sounded a lot like home.

It's no coincidence that both parties highlighted politicians like Florida Sen. Marco Rubio and San Antonio Mayor Julian Castro.

Rubio, whose parents are from Cuba, introduced Mitt Romney at the Republican convention; Castro, whose grandmother immigrated from Mexico, became the first Latino to give the Democrats' keynote address.

Their speeches, while delivered in English, included some Spanish. Even Mitt Romney's son Craig opened his speech in Spanish, a language he learned while working as a Mormon missionary.

In this year's presidential election, Latinos are a major voting bloc – and Spanish is getting its close-up.

"As a Latina mom of two children I'm raising bilingual, it's a great way of showing them why they need to continue speaking Spanish," writes Roxana Soto, author of the book Bilingual is Better, in an email interview with NPR.

"Listening to the various convention speakers sprinkle sentences and phrases in Spanish throughout their speeches is like music to my ears," says Soto. "I feel like it will help elevate my first language to another level and will hopefully show others that just because we speak Spanish doesn't mean we can't speak English, too."

Read the whole story

Bike enthusiasts putting on fundraiser to get park in the ground

The Tahoe Area Mountain Biking Association and the South Lake Tahoe BMX Association are working to build a pump track,

mountain bike skills park, and relocate the BMX track.

The 4-acre park will be located in Bijou Community Park, near other community recreation features like the skate park and disc golf course.

The groups are in the design and permitting stage of the Bijou Bike Park. At this time there is no funding. Therefore a local volunteer team of people who work at Design Workshop, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, U.S. Forest Service, and South Lake Tahoe are donating time to put together documents that get the permits and then implement the bike park. Simultaneously bike park design consultants Alpine Bike Parks from Whistler is designing all the specific bike elements. A complete set of construction documents is expected this fall for permits, with construction hopefully starting next summer.

To get to that point the volunteer team is on a fund-raising campaign. That process starts Sept. 14 at the American Legion (2748 Lake Tahoe Blvd.) in South Lake Tahoe. The event starts at 6pm, with music at 7pm. Cost is $10, with kids free. All proceeds from the party go to the bike park.

A raffle, silent auction and photo booth are part of the festivities.