Funding for road improvements requires S. Tahoe to take loan

By Kathryn Reed

A series of decisions by South Lake Tahoe's City Council on Tuesday is designed to begin improving the look of the area as well as the functionality.

The city will borrow close to $6 million to fund $5 million in improvements. The other million bucks is for debt service and the cost of issuance of the certificate of participation.

It's anticipated the interest rate will be less than 5 percent. The bonds are expected to be sold in early July, with the city having its cash by July 20. The city is able to use its roads as collateral for bondholders. In other words, if the city defaults, somehow the bondholders will own the city's streets.



South Lake Tahoe streets will be torn up and put together like new this summer. Photo/LTN file

The bulk of the money will be to fix 12.5 miles of city streets – 8.5 miles called collectors, the remainder residential.

The remaining money will be used to improve Harrison Avenue – assuming property owners agree to a plan. If they don't get on the same page this summer, the city is contemplating how to spend that $1.5 million – buying fire trucks, sprucing up the recreation center are some ideas.

The remaining quarter million being borrowed will be used to revamp Linear Park.

Harrison Ave. and Linear Park are slated for improvements to be made next building season while planning and design are wrapped up in 2012.

Alice Jones, CFO with Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association, pointed out how it would be nice if the city conferred with her group when work will be done on streets in their neighborhood. This is so projects can be coordinated.

The Keys board on Saturday approved replacing the water line on Venice Drive to coincide with the city repairing the street so the asphalt is dug up once.

In other council news:

• The council approved a 10-year agreement with Tahoe Sports and Entertainment to operate the ice rink. An automatic additional 10 years would be added if the concessionaire puts in $500,000 worth of improvements – which it plans to do in the next few years. That means TSE will eventually have close to the 20-year agreement it sought earlier this year but was denied.

• Letters to Tahoe Regional Planning Agency regarding the Regional Plan update were approved.

• A rest room with state money will be built at El Dorado

Beach. Even though there is one at Lakeview Commons, this one is expected to be open year-round and help handle the crowds. It could be done by October. It will also include an office for the aquatic invasive species program people. (El Dorado Beach boat launch will open this summer, but it's not certain if it will before July 4. Launching fee is $13, with the city getting one-quarter of that and the concessionaire the rest.)

Opinion: Teamwork allowed Lakeview Commons to succeed

By Deb Vreeland

Does it take a vision or does it start with a vision?

South Lake Tahoe, clearly a jewel in its own right, was feeling lackluster. There was no sense of place. No central gathering area. A lack of community, some said. It's easy to pontificate on making things better – even easier to reflect on the good ole days.

But what wasn't easy at all, *was reaching consensus on what the passion of the people in a particular place would do with a prime piece of public open space and the funding to make it a special place.*



Deb Vreeland's leadership helped get Lakeview Commons through planning and design. Photo/LTN

So with far less fanfare than sheer will, a small group of individuals came together. And they kept coming together. They talked about what had transformed on the North Shore and what things looked like in other places across the country. And what things *could* look like here.

In all honesty, I don't recall the details of who all the "right" people were or where the vision and passion started, or who is or was the main catalyst for making something happen. But I do know that by the time I came into the picture, there were clearly leaders who had an idea that something needed to happen. And perhaps most critical, they had identified funding sources for making something happen. Regrettably, there were far more naysayers and "this will never happen'" philosophizers than there were visionaries. But that's what helps make Lakeview Commons so much the success it is today.

So here we are: we have funding, we have the city and county partnering on a project, and we have volunteers who are driven to seeing the vision become a reality. I was still, at this point, on the periphery. I had dubious thoughts of my own; but I was impressed with the momentum. There was drive to make something happen, and I was honored to be asked to help see this "thing" become something. My role was to manage the

process. This meant seeing that all the parts and pieces came together – on time and on budget. And the overall responsibility was making certain the vision became something you could see and touch.

When the California Tahoe Conservancy organized and orchestrated a design charette, the wheels were in motion. Top design firms sent their best and brightest to South Lake Tahoe with briefcases of colored pencils, reams of blank drawing paper, and lots of creative design power. With real-time input from community members who interacted with the designers, four vastly different design concepts were unveiled in a packed public forum. Wow! The things that could be done with this place were almost incomprehensible.

The conceptual design from Royston, Hanamoto, Alley & Abey of Mill Valley was selected for implementation, and they were contracted to develop the concepts into engineering drawings that could ultimately be funded and built. It is safe to say no one really grasped at this point how the 56 acres of developed land that was begging for improvement would ever be transformed. And it is also clear, upon reflection, that most of us involved had no idea that something real would be built sooner than anyone expected – and on the beach no less.

Suffice it to say that whoever birthed the idea of a steering committee was – at that moment in time or forever – brilliant. Volunteers who demonstrated their willingness to devote time and energy into making a vision a reality were recruited and put to work. They spent hours reviewing designs, providing input and feedback, and simply being present at an extraordinary number of public meetings, all of which were dipping into their own personal time. After getting to know each of them individually throughout the process, I think it’s safe to say that they are rewarded for every minute they spent to see this project become the reality it is today.

At this point in time, we – the steering committee, the RHAA

design team, Kathay Lovell, Norma Santiago, Ray Lacey, Peter Eichar, and far too many other individuals who never missed a step of this process – were coming together on a regular basis, driving ourselves by deadlines, and working cohesively to see a plan become a project and then become a place. The dedicated public made their voices heard. They were explicit in what they wanted and what they needed. The designers drafted and redrafted. All the while, cost estimates were refined and nailed down. All of this activity took place over many months, but it never languished. We pushed and sometimes prodded and, over time, the vision crystallized.

With the dedicated support of the California Tahoe Conservancy leaders and the cooperative team work of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and other agency representatives, the budget, the permits, and a plan for construction came together. The plans were approved and a construction bid document was prepared. The planning, permitting and design phase was not complete. A hand off to the construction team was next.

What took somewhere on the order of four plus years to conceive, create, convince and construct was finally a reality and no longer a vision. A true example of dedication, collaboration and a willingness to believe is now resting majestically on the South Shore of Lake Tahoe – for everyone to enjoy.

Revel in it!

Deb Vreeland was project manager through the planning phase of Lakeview Commons. Prior commitments will keep her from today's 2pm dedication.

What have you done to prepare for a wildfire or other emergency?

Hearing loss is not something that happens just to older people

By Danielle Knowlton

A common myth is hearing loss only affects “old people” and it is merely a sign of aging. The majority (65 percent) of people with hearing loss are younger than 65. There are more than 6 million people in the United States between the ages of 18 and 44 with hearing loss, and nearly 1.5 million are school age.

Did you know that untreated hearing loss can not only affect your ability to understand speech, but can also negatively impact your social and emotional well-being and ultimately decrease your quality of life?



Danielle Knowlton

The signs of hearing loss can be subtle and may emerge very slowly, or can be quite significant and come on suddenly. In either case, there are common indications. **Possible social and emotional indications of hearing loss include:**

• Requiring frequent repetition and having difficulty following conversations.

• Thinking words and voices sound muddled or hearing mumbling.

• Having difficulty hearing in noisy situations like restaurants, malls or crowded rooms.

• Answering or responding inappropriately in conversations.

• Having trouble hearing people with higher-pitched voices.

• Hearing ringing in your ears.

• Reading lips or intently watching people’s faces when they speak to you.

• Feeling stressed from straining to hear what others are saying.

• Feeling embarrassed about meeting new people or misunderstanding what others say.

• Feeling annoyed at other people because you can’t hear or understand them.

• Withdrawing from social situations because of hearing difficulties.

Physically, many things can contribute to hearing loss:

• Having a family history of hearing loss.

• Taking medications that can harm the hearing system (ototoxic drugs).

• Having diabetes or heart, circulation or thyroid problems.

• Exposure to very loud sounds over a long period or a single exposure to explosive noise.

In children, hearing issues can cause obstacles with speech and language development and cognitive thinking skills, especially if hearing loss occurs at birth or before speech and language are acquired. They may develop emotional difficulties and low self-esteem. Learning and behavior problems may arise at school. While most children are screened for hearing loss at birth, hearing loss can occur later, so if there are any concerns, they should be retested.

If you notice any of the signs above, call Barton Audiology or see your primary care physician for a referral. It may just be the best news you've "heard" all day.

If you or a loved one shows signs of hearing loss, make an appointment with Barton Audiology at (530) 543.5815.

Danielle Knowlton is an audiologist with Barton Health.

Garage sale benefits St. Theresa School

St. Theresa School, Knights of Columbus and the Women's Guild are having an inaugural garage sale on June 23 from 9am-3pm.

The event will be in the parking lot of St. Theresa Church in South Lake Tahoe.

Donations of small appliances, household and baby items, toys and gently used clothing are being accepted at the school on

June 22 from 9am-5pm.

S. Tahoe council disagrees on eminent domain for loop road

By Kathryn Reed

Just as the South Lake Tahoe City Council appeared to be on the same page regarding how to approach the divisive loop road project, bickering and stubbornness took hold.

All five agree a letter needs to be written to the Tahoe Transportation District with strong language encouraging that bi-state agency to investigate more than one proposal for the loop road.

It is highly unusual for an environmental impact report or environmental impact study (both are being done) to delve into just one idea. While a preferred alternative is common, usually the document looks into more than one plan.

Not so when it comes to the loop road.

The project would reroute Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe to go through standing businesses and residences in South Lake Tahoe, then behind Harrah's and MontBleu in Stateline.

Highway 50 from about where it intersects with Pioneer Trail on the north side of town would become a city street through the casino corridor.

Perhaps because the discussion started negatively June 19 with

Mayor Claire Fortier wondering why the item was even on the agenda it should not have come as a surprise that Councilman Tom Davis would not budge on his motion.

The motion called for more alternatives to be studied, acknowledgement the current council would not use eminent domain, and the request that an independent economic study be conducted.

The vote was 3-2 with Fortier and Councilwoman Angela Swanson in the minority. These two don't want to lock the city into saying no to eminent domain when it's possible an alternative for the loop road the council likes could require that taking of property.

Fortier and Swanson went so far as to say they will not sign the letter.

The juvenile banter returned at that point after what had been a fairly professional discussion. Davis said he might want to withdraw his name from letters he didn't agree with. Fortier said the issue will become a political point of contention in the November council race. (Bruce Grego and Hal Cole's seats are up.) Grego said maybe the voters should be asked to make the decision on the loop road. (He has clients with property in the area who could be affected if the current proposal goes through, but has yet to recuse himself from any of the discussions.)

Fourteen members of the public spoke at Tuesday's meeting before the bickering council members deliberated. Another 16 letters were part of the day's record, too.

The loop road will be on the July 3 agenda for the council to talk about commenting on the draft relocation plan. Comments will be due a week later.

City staff told the council that the document lacks specifics, especially when it comes to businesses, and really just meets

the basic requirements of federal law. Still, the relocation of people and businesses are the main sticking points with locals, and is what's at the heart of the eminent domain discussion.

In the end, it really doesn't matter what the city says or thinks, the TTD board – of which Swanson is a member – can do what it wants. That board is expected at its July 20 meeting to discuss looking at more alternatives. Swanson will be absent and her alternate, Grego, will be city's rep. However, TTD does not have eminent domain authority; the city and Caltrans do.

Meditation class at Tahoe Wellness Center

Rosemary Manning will lead a guided meditation, along with deep breathing – an hour of relaxation and contemplation – on June 25 from 6-7pm.

The session is at Tahoe Wellness Community Center (next to Hot Gossip in the Bijou Center).

The class is free, but donations are accepted.

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2 birds in South Lake Tahoe found to have West Nile virus

Two American robins from the Tahoe Keys area tested positive for the West Nile virus.

The birds were found June 6.

The El Dorado County Environmental Management Department released the news June 19.

To date, no human cases of the virus have been reported in 2012.

When a dead bird or squirrel is found, call the state West Nile Virus Hotline at 877.968.2473.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

No contest plea by retired El Dorado County sergeant

By Max Ehrenfreund, Sacramento Bee

Don Atkinson, the former president of the El Dorado County Deputy Sheriff's Association and a retired sergeant, pleaded no contest on felony counts of embezzlement, fraud and perjury, according to Lynda Gledhill, a spokeswoman for the California Office of the Attorney General.

Prosecutors allege Atkinson stole money from the Deputy Sheriff's Association, filed perjured campaign finance reports and stole $100,000 from an elderly woman by securing a loan

from her under false pretenses.



Don
Atkinson

As part of a plea agreement, Atkinson will be sentenced to five years in state prison. He will pay $338,348.14 in restitution to the Deputy Sheriff's Association, and he will repay the $100,000 he is accused of stealing from the woman, Gledhill said. In addition, she said, he will direct the California Public Employees' Retirement System to pay $1,000 per month from his retirement account to the victims while he is in prison and on parole.

Atkinson was arrested in March after an investigation by the California Attorney General's Office and the El Dorado District Attorney's Office. He will receive his sentence July 30, Gledhill said.

Atkinson spent a number of years patrolling streets in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

He is the detective who in 2006 handled teacher Karsten Gronwald's child pornography case on the South Shore. In 2007, he was widely quoted admonishing then Sheriff Jeff Neves for shuffling assignments that put search and rescue responsibilities in the hands of Placerville deputies. Atkinson was vocal with the Board of Supervisors when it came to budget cuts.

– Lake Tahoe News contributed to this story.

World Tribe Canoe Project descends on Lakeview Commons

On June 20, indigenous carvers from around the world will convene along the shores of Lake Tahoe to create a 70-foot Trimaran by blending ancient art with state of the art.

It will be under the direction of Maori Chief Wikuki Kingi and hosted by the Washoe tribe.

Upon completion, this “floating university” will travel the world sharing indigenous wisdom in service to protecting our world’s water. The goal is to launch at the 2013 America’s Cup in San Francisco.

Traveling 10,000 miles from Aotearoa, New Zealand, Kingi and Tania Wolfgramm (Tonga-Maori) will lead the indigenous protocols and ceremony starting the World Tribe Canoe Project at 3:30pm at Lakeview Commons in South Lake Tahoe.

It will be followed by live music and Liz Brosco leading a drum circle at 5pm featuring Washoe and fire dancers. The California canoe and tule boats demonstrations will be featured with carvings by Wikuki at the 4th annual Lake Tahoe Paddle Festival on June 23-24 from 9am to 5pm.