Northstar master plan changes approved

By Jessie Marchesseau

Housing for workers and traffic were two of the main concerns of Placer County planning commissioners on Feb. 2 as they discussed amendments to Northstar's master plan.

The 20-year Northstar Mountain Master Plan includes the following key points:

· 5 new lifts

· A gondola from the lower parking lots

· 25 new ski trails on approximately 175 acres

· 400 acres of new tree skiing

· Widening of existing ski trails

· Additional snowmaking on 13 exiting trails and 12 of the proposed trails

· 3 new lodges/warming huts

· Relocating the cross country center

· Expanding the existing Summit Deck and Grille

· A long-term forest fuels reduction and timber harvest plan

· A habitat management plan including resource protection, seasonal wildlife closures, forest management, invasive weed management and more.

A lengthy presentation explained the above plans and Northstar's desire to make a better experience for resort

visitors through expanding terrain and services. There was no mention of the Forest Flyer roller coaster discussed in the past, nor any mention of other summertime services.

Allen Breuch, supervising planner with Placer County, introduced the agenda item and the Northstar representatives in attendance. Breuch gave a recap of the plan, reminding the commission that it came before the planning commission in 2012 and the final EIR has been completed.

Only a very small portion of the improvements would be located within the Tahoe basin, and those would be subject to Tahoe Regional Planning Agency approval.

Northstar representatives noted there will be significant unavoidable impacts. Adding new trails and lifts will have a visual impact from Highway 267. There would also be air quality impacts during construction.

Northstar estimates the expansion will require hiring about 110 new full-time employees who would then need a place to live. Northstar intends to create employee housing to accommodate 75 percent of those employees, though there are no specifics yet on how they would accomplish it.

Commissioners noted that housing is a hot issue right now, in short supply and high demand. They stressed how important it would be for Northstar to carry through on that part of the plan.

The commissioners also expressed concern about parking and traffic issues. On recent weekends, cars trying to enter Northstar have been backed up all the way to Interstate 80. Commissioner Larry Sevison said he was worried this might give a bad name not only to Northstar, but to the Tahoe ski industry as a whole.

The congestion doesn’t hold up just skiers, but locals trying to travel from Truckee to Kings Beach as well, he said.

Northstar representatives skirted the issue without giving any real answer or solution. The master plan was designed to reduce crowding on the ski hill by adding new runs, but does nothing to address the parking problem. The resort will be adding only 20 parking spaces, and those will be at the new cross country ski center location.

Northstar General Manager Nadia Guerriero explained the master plan will “improve guest and employee experiences … with on-mountain, recreational and skier improvements.” She added that it does not include real estate or parking expansion.

With the master plan and EIR already submitted, Northstar was before the commission with a handful of specific items.

The requests brought before the commission were:

· An amendment to relocate an existing tourist/resort commercial land use area.

· Rezone two existing forestry zone areas so one would align with the relocated Martis Valley Community Plan land use designation square, and the other adjusted to a “more suitable location” for development of campsites.

· A zoning text amendment to Placer County Code amending the definition of “ski lift facilities” and “ski runs” and Timberland Production Zone to allow for the development of ski lift facilities and ski runs as a conditionally permitted use within land boundaries owned and/or operated by existing ski resorts within TPZ land located outside the Tahoe basin.

· Approval of a conditional use permit to allow the Northstar Mountain Master Plan which would guide development of the resort over a projected 20-year period.

When the floor opened to public comment, eight people stepped up to offer their opinion. Of those, two expressed concerns about the plan, one about the parking and traffic issue, the

other about the soundness of the EIR. The other six commenters were in full support of the plan and the requested changes.

Breuch assured commissioners the EIR was done correctly.

Commissioners approved all requests unanimously.

The commission also approved the extension of a special use permit for the timeshare project at 215 Anderson Road and 6731 North Lake Blvd. in Tahoe Vista. According to representatives on behalf of PFK Development Group, financing issues delayed the project, but the company is ready to move forward with demolishing the existing buildings this summer. Two community members spoke up from the Tahoe City office with complaints about the current condition of the property including trash, severe dilapidation and wild animals. The commission voted to grant the extension with a condition that demolition of existing structures will begin during the 2017 building season.

The Feb. 2 Placer County Planning Commission meeting was in Auburn, though both items on the consent agenda concerned properties located in the Tahoe-Truckee area. Tahoe residents wishing to give input without traveling to Auburn were invited to attend the meeting via interactive video at the Placer County Administrative Offices in Tahoe City.

Poll: Trump, non-Trump voters agree on public lands

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

If bitter political fighting is tearing your Facebook feed

apart at the seams, take heart.

There’s at least one issue that does more to unite than divide voters in the western United States; public lands.

Polling from seven western states shows Democrats, Republicans and independent voters have similar interests when it comes to federally managed public land.

The poll, conducted through the Colorado College State of the Rockies project and led by Democratic and Republican consultants, measured the attitudes of voters in Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico.

Read the whole story

Sandoval set to slash $20M from mental health

By Anjeanette Damon, Reno Gazette-Journal

Gov. Brian Sandoval has proposed slashing the state’s chronically underfunded mental health budget by $20 million– including eliminating 112 positions statewide– arguing that the expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act means more mentally ill clients can find care in private hospitals.

But advocates for the mentally ill say even with Medicaid coverage, patients have difficulty accessing private care in Reno, citing a shortage in psychiatrists in private practice, too-few psychiatrists accepting new patients and a shortage of in-patient treatment beds.

Even more troubling for them is the prospect that Congress has

promised to repeal the Affordable Care Act, which means all of the mentally ill clients who now have insurance under Medicaid could lose coverage at the same time the state is shrinking a key safety net.

Read the whole story

Zeroing in on future of Kings Beach park, pier

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – California State Parks wants to turn the centerpiece of Kings Beach into a masterpiece.

Overhauling the master plan from 1980 for the Kings Beach State Recreation Area and replacing the pier that boats can't reach are closer to being a reality. Creating a more welcoming, aesthetically pleasing, environmentally sensitive destination that links the land to the water are the goals.

On Thursday night the preferred alternative for the master plan was unveiled. Instead of picking one of the three alternatives, what are deemed the best aspects of the project were selected and incorporated into essentially what is a new alternative.

The preferred placement for the pier is on the eastern edge. (All three alternatives will be studied in the environmental documents.) It would be part fixed and part floating. While the pier would be able to accommodate boat shuttles, it is not being designed as a port for a cross lake ferry.



Marilyn Linkem, superintendent of the Sierra District for State Parks, talks Feb. 2 about the future of Kings Beach. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“What goes away is the motorized boat launch,” explained Lisa O’Daly of the California Tahoe Conservancy. The ramp has been unusable since 2012 because of the drought, and since 2008 it has been off-limits 75 percent of the time.

O’Daly’s agency is integral to the process because it owns some of the land in the area and has been involved with planning grants for part of the project.

Non-motorized watercraft will be encouraged to use the area even more. A building to keep kayaks-canoes-paddleboards is part of the plans.

Specifically what the pier will look like was a concern of one man who attended the Feb. 2 presentation. While the agencies tend to like structures to blend in with the natural environmental, he was a proponent of making it architecturally appealing, as well as functional. That level of design is still a ways off.

All of the environmental documents – CEQA, environmental impact report for the general plan, and EIR/EIS for the pier – need to be completed. The goal is to have them finalized about a year from now.

State Parks engineers will then plot out what it will cost. The Legislature and state Department of Finance must give their OK, and will help with financing.

“Then we decide the implementation; if we do phases,” Marilyn Linkem, superintendent of the Sierra District for State Parks, told *Lake Tahoe News*. Once the other state agencies weigh in it will be a few more years before any work is done.

Build out? No speculation for that date.

A promenade on the edge of the beach will go from the event center to Koon Street. From there it will be up to Placer County what happens. Lookouts will be built in so people can take in the scenery without blocking pedestrians or bicyclists.

Retaining walls and vegetation are part of the plan. Those two items are key to keeping sand out of the parking lot.

Today whenever sand reaches the asphalt it has to be hauled away. Per Tahoe Regional Planning Agency rules the parking lot sand cannot be returned to the beach.

The parking lot will be reconfigured a bit so when driving in vehicles are not the main focus. There will be a 12 percent or 22-car space reduction.

“This is a state recreation area, not a state parking area,” Steve Musillami with State Parks said.

An automated pay system is expected to be implemented this spring.

The basketball court will be relocated. Near it will be a grassy area with a stage. Bands or the like could also bring in a portable stage. It’s possible the audience could be on the beach or the lawn.

Current restrooms will be upgraded and another one added.

For now dogs on leashes will still be allowed in a section of the park, but dogs are not part of the general plan overview. That level of detail will be up to State Parks in the future.

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Notes:

· More information is available **online**.

· Comments are being accepted until Feb. 15. They may be emailed to plan.general@parks.ca.gov.

David Kelly – 1943-2017



David Kelly

South Lake Tahoe's main advocate for the disabled has died.

David Joseph Kelly passed away in his sleep at his South Lake Tahoe home on Jan. 31, 2017. He was 73.

Kelly is the man behind Tahoe Senior Plaza, Kelly Ridge (named in his honor), and Sky Forest Acres. These three South Lake Tahoe developments are affordable housing for seniors and those with disabilities.

He was born Feb. 19, 1943. Though he lived with post-polio syndrome and was told he would not live a long life, he proved many doctors wrong.

He used to be a regular at City Council meetings. His involvement led him to being named an honorary firefighter by the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department.

In the early 1980s Kelly believed people were being mistreated locally. That's when he started to become involved in local issues.

"I do it because it needs to be done," Kelly told *Lake Tahoe News* in 2013.

For years he was the force behind the Tahoe Area Coordinating Council for the Disabled. He was also on several other boards related to the disabled. When businesses were being sued by an out of town attorney for ADA violations, Kelly worked with the locals.

His activism was noted by the many awards he received such as the Betty Davis Award for his exemplary service to the community, the Ellie O'Toole Humanitarian of the Year Award, as well as the ABHOW Presidential Citation Award.

Kelly's legacy is evident by the housing he got built, as well as his family, whom he could never say enough about.

He is predeceased by his father, Lloyd Dunham.

Kelly is survived by wife Coco; mother Patricia; sisters Patti (Dennis) and Debi (Bob); children Patty (Jimmy), Debbie (Myk), Joey (Scott,) and Jason (Allison); 14 grandchildren; and 13 great-grandchildren.

Services will be at St. Theresa Catholic Church in South Lake Tahoe on Feb. 4 at 1:30pm.

In lieu of flowers, donations to the family may be made to the

family's **Fundly account** to help cover costs of services.

Snowpack near Echo Summit 153% of average



The deep snowpack could mean an extended ski season. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Lake Tahoe News

What a difference a month makes. The snowpack just keeps getting deeper and that's a good thing.

"We've got a very good snowpack, a very robust snowpack on the ground right now," Frank Gehrke said Thursday after taking a

series of measurements in the field near the entrance to Sierra-at-Tahoe. He noted there is as much snow on the ground as there can be at the usual peak in April.

The water equivalency of the 90 inches of snow at Phillips Station measured 28.1 inches. The average this time of year is 11.3 inches, so this is 153 percent of the historical average at this location. This is the highest measurement for February in 12 years.

Under overcast skies and the promise by forecasters of more snow, the field was dramatically different than a month ago. At the Jan. 3 snow survey the water content was 6 inches, which is 53 percent of average for then.

The news is good statewide – the snowpack contains 31 inches of water, which is 173 percent of the Feb. 2 average of 18.1 inches.

The average annual precipitation at the eight-station Northern California index is 50 inches. That total was surpassed on Jan. 20. Since October, when the water year began, 58.22 inches of rain have been recorded in Northern California. The record for that same four-month period was set in 1997 – 58.22 inches.

The water content is critical because the snowpack supplies about 30 percent of California's water needs as it melts in the spring and early summer.

Shasta Lake, California's largest surface reservoir is at 114 percent of its historical average, while a year ago it was at 78 percent. Lake Oroville, the State Water Project's largest reservoir, is at 121 percent of its historical average today compared to 68 percent in 2016.

Indicators still show almost half of California in a drought, but that's all south of here.

LTUSD steaming toward reopening Al Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

A light is being shined on the lack of equality in Lake Tahoe Unified School District as officials work toward reopening Al Tahoe Elementary School.

Declining enrollment forced the school to be closed in 2004. Now the remaining four elementary schools are overcrowded, necessitating some form of relief.

On Jan. 31 the school board had its second workshop pertaining to the future of Al Tahoe. Ideas and opinions were discussed, but this was not a night to vote on any proposals. Nonetheless, the wheels are in motion to make this a reality.

After the district created the magnet school in Meyers there has been a concerted effort to make each elementary have its own theme. Bijou's theme is bilingual education; Sierra House – fitness, health, mountain sports; Meyers – environment; Tahoe Valley – performing arts. But some are more robust than others and all do not reflect the complexion of the whole community.

Al Tahoe would be the STEAM Academy. STEAM stands for science, technology, engineering, art and math.

Tuesday's staff report said, "STEAM takes STEM to the next level by allowing students to connect their learning in these areas with art practices, design principles, and standards. The A in STEAM doesn't just represent the arts but is more of a broad term that represents liberal arts, language arts,

social studies, physical arts, and fine arts and music. It’s a framework for teaching which is customizable and functional, hence the fun in functional. It’s about applying creative thinking to STEM projects, and sparking students’ imagination and creativity through the arts. It’s about exploring where art naturally fits into the STEM subjects.”

Much of the board as well as parents would like science in particular to be available to all students. While the magnet school focuses on the environment, that isn’t the case throughout the district.

“The Al Tahoe program looks great,” parent Rebecca Bryson said. But what she worries is that it “could be further ghettoizing the schools.”

Board member Larry Reilly said, “Parity is an issue.” He would like to see the curriculum at Al Tahoe offered to other students, even it means exporting it. This, he suggested, could be done similar to when PE instructors traveled to the various school sites. Classroom space could be created so students learned some of the STEAM lessons.

Bonnie Turnbull, another board member, also spoke of lack of equality.

“I worry some kids will be left behind,” she said. With parents being responsible for choosing a child’s school, she fears some parents won’t understand all that STEAM can offer, and that gender and ethnicity may play a role in decision making.

For board member Angela Swanson her concern is for the students in the neighborhood be given first priority to attend Al Tahoe.

The current proposal by staff is to open in the fall with preschool. By 2020-21 the school would house K-5.

Kelly Martin, who is in charge of curriculum for the district, explained how at the start the learning would be in a fun lab where experimentation is encouraged and failure means just starting over again. Don't think science lab, but instead creative learning space. Curriculum would get more complex with each grade level.

"A makerspace is a collaborative workspace for making, learning, exploring and sharing that uses high tech to no tech tools. The maker mindset is creating something out of nothing and exploring your interests that are at the core of a makerspace," the staff report says.

The district is eligible for Proposition 51 dollars to pay for the renovations – like a new boiler and revamping the kitchen. Portables that are more than 20 years old can also be upgraded with that money.

The plan also is to create a child care facility.

"Childcare has become a nationwide concern due to rising numbers of working parents and the increase in childcare costs. Looking ahead, the district faces issues in recruiting new teachers, housing for district staff, and childcare. The district proposes to accommodate an employee childcare center which could dramatically reduce costs-of-living for families," the staff report says.

Nev. awaits Supreme Court ruling on sports betting

By Gary Martin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON – With millions expected to be wagered illegally on the upcoming Super Bowl, Nevada and gaming officials are eagerly awaiting a U.S. Supreme Court decision on whether states should be allowed to offer legal sports betting.

The Supreme Court delayed a decision on a case brought by New Jersey that challenges a federal law that allows sports wagering only in Nevada and three other states: Delaware, Montana and Oregon.

Nevada has not filed a brief in the case, and Gov. Brian Sandoval said a ruling in favor of New Jersey would help in the fight to reduce illegal gaming and would do little to hurt the Silver State's position as a global destination for gambling and entertainment.

Read the whole story

Housing crunch exacts heavy price on Californians

By Vanessa Rancano, KQED-TV

California is producing less than half the new homes it needs to meet demand in the Golden State.

In its first comprehensive analysis since the year 2000, California's Department of Housing and Community Development paints a bleak picture of the state's housing landscape. While it points to some hopeful developments, the report suggests lawmakers will need to consider serious policy changes if California is going to build the projected 1.8 million new homes needed by 2025.

The Statewide Housing Assessment Report is still in draft form, and its authors are gathering public input at workshops around the state. On Monday a small group of mostly local government representatives and advocates met in Fresno to hear the report's findings.

Read the whole story

Placer County recovering from storm damage

By Michael Rohm

The first thing Harold Slear saw when he walked through the main entrance of Boatworks Mall in Tahoe City just before noon Jan. 8 was merchants pulling inventory from their waterlogged stores.

The owner of James-Harold Galleries, Slear was late for work because he had needed to clear his driveway of the snow that had been falling heavily all night and into the morning. That same precipitation was now responsible for disorder on a greater scale.

"I came in and saw that it was literally raining from the ceiling," he told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Slear walked first to the nearby 1960 Winter Games and Sierra Ski Museum. When he saw the extent of the damage he called his friend David Antonucci. "I think you're going to want to see this," he told him.

The flat roof at Boatworks Mall had already accumulated 3 feet of snow. When the heavy rain hit that weekend, an additional

foot of precipitation augmented the snowpack and swelled above the exhaust ducts in the roof. There was nowhere for the water to go but down the ducts and into the building. The stores beneath these ducts, including the Sierra Ski Museum, were in the direct path of the water.

Despite his meticulous preservation of artifacts, Sierra Ski Museum co-founder David Antonucci, was worried as he drove to the mall. The damage that Slear had described on the phone was unprecedented. Dripping ceiling. Ruined walls. Standing water.



Heaters and blowers work to dry out the ski museum in Tahoe City. Photo/David Antonucci

“This museum is probably the best collection of artifacts from the 1960 Winter Olympics,” Antonucci told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It’s really one of kind.”

When he arrived, Antonucci was relieved to find that his security measures had paid off. The glass cases surrounding the artifacts had kept everything dry.

“It’s really amazing that nothing was damaged,” he said.

Other shops were not as fortunate. According to Antonucci, Geared for Games and Tahoe Shoe & Clothing Co., two stores directly below his museum, were “a complete loss.”

No one from either store could be reached for comment.

In the days following the damage, Channel Properties, the real estate agency that owns Boatworks Mall, began remediation and repair. When the company hired to do the job proved too small for the extensive damage, Channel brought in BELFOR, the largest restoration contractor in the world.

“We got called in because we had the resources to handle it,” said Mark Malcuit, project manager and estimator for BELFOR. “We came in with a large crew to start removing wet material and to dry out the building.”

Since then, the 16-person crew with dehumidifiers have worked around the clock to get the damaged stores back in business. “We’ve finished with demolition and the mall is just about dry,” Malcuit said. “Within another month or so we should have everything put back together.”

The atmospheric river that overwhelmed the drainage system at Boatworks Mall has wreaked havoc throughout all of Lake Tahoe. Placer County eventually declared a local emergency because of the exact conditions that had impacted Boatworks Mall and several other local businesses. The county estimates the financial damage to local infrastructure is as high as $8 million.

DeDe Cordell, director of communications and public affairs for Placer Country, urges small business owners to report any property damage.

“We’re trying to get folks to reach out to make sure we’re connected and tracking damages for local business,” she told

Lake Tahoe News. “If we’re able to get federal assistance, the small business administration can offer assistance.”

Small business owners affected by the storms may contact Placer County Economic Development Director Sherri Conway at 530.889.4096 or go **online** for more information.