LTCC reorg being mapped out in wake of state budget fiasco

By Kathryn Reed

“She has a very strong fiscal background, which is what we need.”

That’s what college board member Fritz Wenck told *Lake Tahoe News* in May when Kindred Murillo was hired to be president of Lake Tahoe Community College. When it comes to numbers, she keeps being tested.



Gov. Jerry Brown’s budget that banks on voters agreeing to raise taxes that are estimated to generate $6.8 billion in November has the South Lake Tahoe two-year college and every entity in the K-14 spectrum scrambling to figure out what to do.

Midyear budget cuts are a reality. That’s the immediate problem that needs to be addressed.

The LTCC and Lake Tahoe Unified School District boards tonight will be discussing their respective budgets and what the actions in Sacramento mean locally.

In addition to a presentation on the budget, an item Murillo will bring forward to get on the Feb. 14 agenda is reorganizing key positions at the college.

“The college cannot afford to not have a vice president of Business Services with the current situation,” Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*. “One thing I’ve learned over my 16 years with community colleges is community colleges fail for a couple of reasons. The first reason is finances of the organization. You

have got to have someone running that area.”

(The title of VP of Business Services will change to VP of Administrative Services when the new person is hired to reflect the job duties.)

The last person to officially have the Business Services job on a full time, permanent basis was Sue Niehoff. She was sent packing by the interim president the board hired for last school year. Niehoff has filed a wrongful termination claim against the college. She did not return a phone call.

After getting rid of Niehoff, then-President Steve Maradian expanded the job of Marc Sabella ,director of fiscal services.

With Murillo’s background in business services for 11 years, she knows the ins and outs of finance. Since her arrival she has been doing the heavy lifting, while Sabella has been responsible for lower level financial work.

As a college president, she has a slew of other responsibilities, thus one of the reasons the board agreed late last year to hire a VP of Administrative Services. Resumes are coming in. But by the time interviews are conducted, someone is selected, that person gives notice and eventually starts at LTCC, it could be late spring-early summer. With the fiscal mess California continues to be mired in – which trickles down to local bodies – Murillo said the status quo can no longer continue.

That is why in the interim before a VP is hired, she is recommending moving Aaron McVean from director of Institutional Research and Planning to interim VP of Administrative Services; putting Bill King, director of Technology, into a position focused on research, report writing and Datatel support; and creating an associate dean of Information Technology for Cheri Jones who now spends half her time on Datatel implementation and half as Admissions and Records director. The last piece would be to hire a dean of

Student Services on a full time basis.

Changing jobs for the three employees mentioned above would not affect the bottom line. This is because the college is saving $13,229 per month without the Business VP. Salary upgrades would leave a savings of $8,000, which could be used for clerical support for IT.

Murillo presented the reorg plan to College Council last week. That body is expected to vote on it Feb. 9. The Academic Senate will hear the proposal Jan. 27.

Some college employees are questioning why McVean would be put in a position – even temporarily – that might appear to be out of his breadth of knowledge.

Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News* she could train anyone to do the VP job as long as they have the aptitude and desire. Since she became president July 5, she said everything she has asked McVean to do he has done at an exemplary level and has proved to her he is up to the task to do more – including being integral in forming the 2012-13 budget.

The LTCC budget update for this fiscal year and looking forward will be presented tonight to the board. The college needs to allocate $314,000 to get through June 30 in order to bridge the gap the state has created. Having put aside more than $430,000 divided between a rainy day fund and a contingency mid-year budget account is proving to be almost clairvoyant on the board and staff's part.

Without a crystal ball, it's hard to know what the state's economy is going to do.

But in South Lake Tahoe, the unemployment rate is dropping. Latest figures have it at 15 percent in the city – down from nearly 18 percent a year ago.

While some would say college employees should be lucky to have

a job, the truth is they could be making more elsewhere. That's something the board is going to have to contend with soon – even in these economic times. Most agendas have a closed session item for labor negotiations.

LTCC's full-time faculty make between 3.4 percent and 9.4 percent less than the going salary; classified are 6.1 off the average; directors make 10.1 percent less than the market.

_____-

The college board meeting is in the Aspen room at LTCC. Here is the LTCC agenda. The meeting starts tonight at 6:20.

LTUSD's meeting starts at 6pm at the district office. Here is that agenda.

School districts struggle to comply with Voters Rights Act

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Unified School District may be in violation of the California Voters Rights Act based on how board members are elected.

While the CVRA was enacted in 2002, the 2010 Census is forcing all elected bodies to look at how people get into office and if constituents are fairly represented. The federal Voting Rights Act also plays a role.



Lake Tahoe Unified School District board members are expected to discuss the issue Feb. 14. LTUSD first broached the subject in January 2011. It's expected to be an agenda item several times this year for LTUSD and Lake Tahoe Community College as they work through the process before their next board elections in 2013.

Lake Tahoe Community College board discussed the issue in October and December.

"The first step would be for the board to determine if it is in the best interest of the district to conduct a study to ensure compliance with the California and federal Voting Rights Acts," Angie Keil, spokeswoman for LTUSD, wrote in an email to *Lake Tahoe News*.

Public hearings and approval from the county office of education are also required.

Earlier this month in a letter from attorney David Girard to El Dorado County Office of Education Superintendent Vicki Barber it says LTUSD is at-risk of violating the CVRA.

LTUSD had district elections when it first formed in 1950 until the mid-1960s. Each of the five board members represented a district. For history buffs, here is a list of LTUSD board members through the years.

South Lake Tahoe staff is aware of the CVRA, but the council has not discussed the issue in open or closed session.

"They have to make the argument we have a racially polarized electorate. I don't believe our town is racially polarized," Nancy Kerry, spokeswoman for South Lake Tahoe, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Changing from at-large elections to district could have the

unintended consequence of creating polarization.

To date, no complaints have been filed with the city, LTUSD or LTCC regarding representation to their boards.

“When you go to area elections in a small community like ours, sometimes you can’t get people to run. You are diluting down the voting base to an even smaller voting base. That is a concern for me,” LTCC President Kindred Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*.

As it stands now for LTCC, LTUSD and South Lake Tahoe, the five members of each board could live on the same street. Everyone in the respective jurisdictions votes for all five electeds.

Changing to district elections would mean dividing the jurisdictions into five areas and one person would be elected from each area.

With LTUSD being further along in the study process, LTCC may be able to piggyback on the research the K-12 district has done and might do. Otherwise, it could cost LTCC $35,000 to conduct a study to determine if it should change how board members are elected.

“The board wants to make sure we are not creating racial polarization. We want to make sure everyone has a voice per the California Voting Rights Act,” Murillo said.

Besides wanting to do the right thing, districts also don’t want to be sued. CVRA lawsuits have cost school districts hundreds of thousands of dollars. Madera Unified’s bill was $1.2 million.

Some have equated the people going after the schools to the man who goes around suing businesses for questionable ADA violations. In other words, it’s about attorneys making a buck and not the greater good of the public.

If an entity is sued under the CVRA, successful plaintiffs can recover all legal costs.

“In order to be successful, the plaintiffs must only prove that racially polarized voting exists and that the subgroup could influence elections under a different system,” Redistricting Partners of Sacramento said in its analysis that was presented to the LTCC board in December.

Paul Mitchell with Redistricting Partners at the Dec. 13 meeting told the board, “It’s not clear you have racially polarized voting.”

He said of the college district’s population of 29,839, 25 percent are Latino and 63 percent are non-Hispanic white. The bulk of the Latinos live in a concentrated area. That could be the problem under the CVRA.

With about 90 percent of districts in California having at-large elections – like LTUSD and LTCC – many could be vulnerable to a lawsuit.

In Douglas County, the school board was presented with three redistricting options at its meeting this month. It was agreed the structure now in place that gives Lake Tahoe a representative to the seven-member board would remain. The board member has to live in the area she or he represents.

“There was some discussion if trends don’t shift, this may be the last time the board can justify an exclusive lake zone,” Superintendent Lisa Noonan told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Network of trails provides hours of cycling in North State

By Kathryn Reed

REDDING – Nearly 10 miles of paved trails without ever getting onto a city street. Clearly, I must not be in Tahoe anymore.

This spectacular ride was in Redding.



Pam Valentine rides one of the many paved trails in Redding. Photos/Kathryn Reed

More than 80 miles of paved and natural surface bike-pedestrian paths are scattered throughout Redding. But they are also linked so it makes for a harmonious experience instead of some disjointed, annoying ride.

Cyclists can go from the Sundial Bridge to Shasta Dam on a paved route – 17.5 miles one-way.

I was glad we didn't park where we had intended to because it meant not going up what the bike shop guys called Cardiac Hill. Instead, my sister, Pam, led Sue and me on a 19-mile round-trip ride through some spectacular scenery before the dam stopped us.

The Keswick Reservoir is to our right as we start our ride. On the north end is the Shasta Dam, to the south is the Keswick Dam. This reservoir is part of the Central Valley Project – one of the main water systems running through California that provides water to farmers and municipalities downstream.

Below the Keswick Dam is the Sacramento River.

A few fishermen are on the Keswick Reservoir in hopes of catching wild trout like German browns and rainbow.

As pretty as the ride is, I know the landscape should be much greener. No moisture until this weekend has left the entire state parched. Still, the austere winter beauty is captivating.

The water is glass-like, providing reflections of the hillside as though it's a mirror.

Rocks protrude from some locations, reminding me of the tufas that dot Mono Lake.

Where the water is shallow it's most obvious how fast the current is as mini rapids are created as the water skips over the rocks.

This is part of the Sacramento River Rail Trail that follows the historic rail alignment. One spot has us passing through a tunnel built in the 1920s.

The trail ends at Shasta Dam where there is a dirt park for all terrain vehicles. Just before we get there a Bureau of Land Management employee (and this was a Saturday) is sweeping some debris from the trail. It's maintained that well.

Redding’s trails are a collaborative project, just like they are in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Where we were last weekend was on Bureau of Land Management property. The McConnell Foundation (founded by the largest shareholders of Farmers Insurance) has contributed significantly to that city’s trails.

The first segment of the Sacramento River Trail opened in 1983. And the network keeps growing.

More information about the Redding Trail System is online. And the trails are accessible year-round.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)

JPA agrees to refinance South Shore recreation bonds

By Kathryn Reed

While it’s up to the recreation JPA board to decide how to spend the $15,000 that is estimated to be saved each year by refinancing the bonds, it is likely to go toward recreation on the South Shore instead of saving taxpayers a few cents on the $18 a year they pay now for the measure.

That will be an agenda item if and when the bond sales go through and there is actual money to talk about.

The South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority – made up of Hal Cole (South Lake Tahoe), Norma

Santiago (El Dorado County), and Debbie Henderson (Tahoe Paradise Resort Improvement District) – agreed Friday to go forward with changing 75 percent of the bonds from tax-exempt to taxable and refinancing the remainder as tax-exempt.



Refinancing the recreation bonds should provide more money for bike trail and ball field maintenance. Photo/LTN

A contingency is the JPA board wants the county Board of Supervisors at its Jan. 24 meeting and Tahoe Paradise board on Jan. 26 to endorse the refinancing idea.

Santiago and Henderson after the meeting told *Lake Tahoe News* they believe their respective boards will give the green light. Both boards have been apprised of the proposal that will be before them.

However, the JPA board can do what it wants without the approval of the three member agency boards. What the JPA board would do if a no vote were given next week by either or both boards, remains a large question mark.

What has changed since the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Jan. 17 approved the refinancing is interest rates have decreased. Compass Bank is now a better alternative than

Alliance Bank.

While financial advisor Mark Northcross would receive a bonus from Alliance if he were to bring the JPA's business there, he is recommending Compass because of the cost savings to his client – the JPA. (He was the financial advisor when the original bonds were sold in 2001.)

On Wednesday, Compass' taxable bonds dropped from 5 percent to 4.75 percent and their tax-exempt bonds dropped from 3.25 percent to 3.2 percent.

Northcross noted if the JPA were to refinance all the bonds at the current tax-exempt status, that the annual savings would be $50,000.

The city, though, maintains changing the bond structure will save taxpayers at least $150,000 more a year because the ice arena will stay in the hands of a private operator. With that entity paying the city rent and other money, the city's coffers could expand even more. City Manager Tony O'Rourke's mantra is the JPA taxpayers benefit if the city is saving money.

Talk of refinancing the bonds was never brought up by the JPA board until South Lake Tahoe realized the contract it had with private operators of the ice rink had to be altered to comply with IRS rules as they relate to for-profits. That meant creating a 50-day termination clause that is black and white.

The original contract between the city and Tahoe Sports Entertainment (and one that is likely to be reinstituted after the bond sales are finalized) was for 10 years, with a 90-day out clause. Dissolution, though, had many strings attached. The longer contract provides incentives for TSE to make substantive investments in the rink.

The ice rink was built with voter-approved Measure S money.

Property owners on the California side of the basin – roughly encompassing the boundaries of Lake Tahoe Unified School District – pay $18 for Measure S. The JPA collects about $630,000 a year. There is $4.5 million in principal owed on the bonds that were approved in 2000 and sunset in 2030.

It's expected the bond sales/refinancing will go through at the end of February.

Also at the meeting, the JPA board appointed people to the bicycle and ball field committees. Creation of the committees fulfills a requirement of the revised recreation measure – called Measure R – that was approved in November.

The two committees will have a joint meeting Feb. 3 at 9am at Lake Tahoe Airport where they will be given a primer on California's opening meeting law and officers will be elected.

All committee meetings will be open to the public.

On the bicycle committee are:

• Russ Dahler

• Peter Fink

• Lauren Lindley

• Shay Navarro

• Charles Nelson

• Eric Thelin

• Mary Lou Whitcomb.

On the fields committee are:

• Marilyn Breisacher

• John Dalton

- Brian Hogan
- Charles Leonard
- Steve Noll
- Ken Riegal
- Steve Weiss.

Whittell High’s 4-day week schedule under scrutiny

By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – Would students or parents want to be at Whittell High School if it were to return to five days a week?

That was an overriding question by some of the more than 40 people who attended a 90-minute workshop Thursday night regarding whether the 7-12 school should stay with its four-day week schedule.

Superintendent Lisa Noonan is engaging the three main stakeholders – students, parents, school staff – to gather their thoughts on the now 3-year-old schedule so she can take that information to the April board meeting.



DCSD Superintendent Lisa Noonan, left, and curriculum specialist Kerry Pope gather input Jan. 19 about Whittell High's four-day week. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The board will also be weighing academic achievement between four vs. five days of instruction.

It was noted that even in analyzing test scores, graduation rates and other academic criteria, the whys of the numbers could be harder to discern. Budget cuts, changes in administrators, closing of one of three schools, curriculum alterations – these are all factors in student achievement as well as how many days a week they have classes.

At the Jan. 19 session the parents, teachers, students and staff who were assembled at Whittell were broken up into three groups. Each had a chance to weigh in on what questions they would like asked on a survey that will be given to the three stakeholder groups, the impact of the schedule on families, and how student achievement has benefited or been hurt.

“The only thing we have to sell people on is the four-day week. Everyone else has a ton of stuff,” parent Kelly Gardner said in comparing Whittell to other high schools in the area.

This schedule is unique beyond the general region. Of the more than 14,000 school districts in the country, 120 have a four-day week.

“A lot of students have said they would leave without a four-day week,” sophomore Maggie Dean said.

Dean and everyone at her table were for keeping the schedule.

She said there is a greater guilt factor in missing a day of school because of the amount of instruction put into a single day.

Gardner said it has benefited her kids, in particular by missing less school when they are doing extracurricular activities.

Looking at attendance is one thing parents brought up to compare to the former five-day schedule.

While the sports schedule was an overriding reason to go to the four-day schedule when the board voted to do so in spring 2009, since then the league has altered game days and may do so again.

Students said there is less wasted time with only four days; that teachers keep things more focused. More learning is going on because labs are able to be longer and other classes benefit from a sustained learning period.

They also said having Fridays off allowed for them to do homework that day; to actually spend more time on school work outside of class.

“There is less burn out and more family time,” parent Brenda Munn said of the current schedule.

Students seconded the sentiment, saying that Friday was like having a real day off – a mental day.

The district is taking written comments until Feb. 3. They may be mailed to DCSD Superintendent's Office, 1638 Mono Ave., Minden, NV 89423.

A survey will be put together in the coming weeks and disseminated electronically at school to students and staff, and emailed to parents. An independent third party will collate the data for it to be presented to the board. Some open-ended questions will allow people to go into greater detail about their thoughts.

The board could make a decision at the April 10 3:30pm meeting at Zephyr Cove library.

Judge dismisses suit League filed against South Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe essentially won its case in which the League

to Save Lake Tahoe sued to try to stop the General Plan from being a legal working document.

U.S. District Court Judge Garland Burrell on Thursday dismissed the case that was filed last year after the City Council voted to approve the General Plan.

Carl Young, who is still acting director of the League, told *Lake Tahoe News*, "We are currently weighing our options." He did not elaborate, only to say, "It could mean anything."

South Lake Tahoe City Manager Tony O'Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*, "I think it's a sign of progress that the city can challenge these legal intrusions and continue to do the right thing. It's not just declaring victory, but I hope it creates a constructive relationship with the League. We need to create partnerships and common ground."

The League in its challenge had contended the General Plan did not match the Regional Plan of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. While that was true and known at the time of adoption, the city never intended to apply components of the General Plan that did not match TRPA's rules. It is still anticipated when the Regional Plan is adopted (which could be in December) that then the two planning documents will mirror each other in ways that they don't today.

"The League has failed to demonstrate that it is reasonably probable that [the city's failure to submit the General Plan update to TRPA for approval] will threaten the League's and its members' concrete interests," Burrell said.

O'Rourke went on to say the city is as interested in maintaining Lake Tahoe's clarity as the League is, but economic vitality needs to be part of the discussion. He also said economics and the environment can go hand-in-hand and

that it’s time everyone gets on the same page to make that a reality.

Tahoe-ites think big and small to help women in Kenya

By Jennifer Gurecki

Barey’s eyes widened with wonder as she held the piece of paper in her hand. She struggled to decipher the words on the document, but understood its significance – the number, 5,000 Kenyan shillings, would be paid to her to start her own small business baking and selling chapati to support her family.

As a child, Barey never had a chance to learn to read or write, or learn anything else besides street smarts and the necessity of hard work. But now, as a 41-year-old widow, she has earned an opportunity to break free of the vicious cycle of living hand-to-mouth, day after day after day.

The loan to Barey, the equivalent of $59, was one of nine loans provided to aspiring Kenyan women entrepreneurs this past December by the Zawadisha Fund, a South Lake Tahoe-based organization that Julie Lowe and I co-founded in 2010. The idea germinated when I wrote my master’s thesis on how social norms impact women’s ability to participate fully and freely in society. When I surveyed women in Eldoret, Kenya, they repeatedly said the greatest barrier to prosperity, and thus empowerment, is access to capital and participation in the economy.



South Lake Tahoe's Jen Gurecki, co-founder of Zawadisha, congratulates Barey on her micro-loan. Photos/Provided

Armed with this knowledge and inspired by the success of the Grameen Bank – which along with its founder Mohammad Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for providing small low-interest loans to Bangladeshi women – Zawadisha has sought to develop an effective microfinance program to improve the lives of Kenyan women and their families.

The results so far are encouraging. Aptly named the Tuinuane Project by the loan recipients, which means “to lift up” in Swahili, after just one year the women report they have been able to contribute financially to their families for the first time in their lives. And of the eight women granted loans for 2011, six paid back their loans enabling us to lend additional funds to the successful six and provide loans to Barey and two other women in December.

Though the sustainability of the program is promising, we strive to innovate to increase the project’s effectiveness. For example, while in Eldoret in November, we implemented a new savings program in which the fund will match any savings deposited by the women upon full repayment of their loans.

Promoting savings is especially vital in Kenya where life is precarious and one bad turn – an illness, an accident, a marginal decrease in earnings – can prove disastrous to families without savings.

Zawadisha has also joined the fight for the well being of women on another front: confronting an epidemic of rape and violence against women in Kenyan society. In a survey conducted by the United Nations AIDS Inter-Agency Task Team on Gender and HIV, nearly half of Kenyan women reported experiencing violence in their lifetimes and one-quarter reported such violence had occurred within the preceding 12 months.

Of these women, an overwhelming 83 percent experienced violence during their childhood, and 46 percent of those incidents were sexual abuse. Additionally, the U.N. Task Team found that in more than 60 percent of these cases, the abused women and children did not report the crime to anyone. Among its findings, the Task Team concluded that education is a social vaccine that can prevent the spread of violence and HIV.

To promote this "social vaccine," Zawadisha has partnered with a Kenyan couple, Winnie and Duncan Bomba, who founded and run the Dolphin Anti-Rape & AIDS Control Outreach program. The Bombas had lived a "normal" life in Kenya until social activism was abruptly thrust upon them. While staying at her family's home in Eldoret, Winnie woke the next morning to discover that a girl had been beaten, raped, brutalized, and left to die on her family's doorstep.

Regret and concern permeated the neighborhood, but for only so long. Each and every day is a new chapter of survival and struggle, and after several chapters, reflection fades. In Kenya, confronting the past and changing the future seem like fruitless endeavors when faced with the ever-pervading tide of the present.

But Winnie refused to let it be. She resolved to rage against complacency because she suddenly felt complicit otherwise. Her husband, Duncan, had martial arts training and magnetism to match Winnie's determination and energy. Together, they founded the Dolphin program that propelled them to visit schools throughout their "neighborhood" – Greater Nairobi – to teach girls how to avoid confrontations, but defend themselves if necessary, and stem this seemingly endemic cancer on their society. To date, Dolphin has instructed more than 250,000 women and girls in their anti-violence and self-defense workshops.

Zawadisha has bolstered the Bombas' program by providing organizational, technological, fundraising, and material support.

Zawadisha has been greatly aided in its efforts through the generous support of South Tahoe CrossFit, Elevate Wellness, GWOF, Indigo Photography, IRIE Rafting Company, Soroptimist International Tahoe Sierra and many other local donors who believe that global issues are relevant locally and that Lake Tahoe residents have a great deal to offer in human and material resources.

If you would like to learn more or donate to the Zawadisha Fund, go online www.zawadisha.org.

Sean Turner and Julie Lowe contributed to this article. Jennifer Gurecki is co-founder of the Zawadisha Fund.

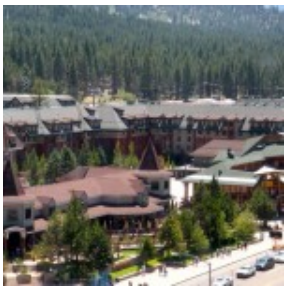
ngg_shortcode_1_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)

Death of redevelopment in California a complicated tale

By Kathryn Reed

A $5 billion a year “industry” that has existed in California since 1945 is about to die.

South Lake Tahoe’s redevelopment agency is one of more than 400 that must be dissolved by the end of the month because the state is eliminating property tax increment as a financing tool.



Embassy Suites and Heavenly Village are projects some say would not have been built without a redevelopment agency. Photo/LTN file

Gov. Jerry Brown wants the money cities collect through redevelopment to go to education and public safety. Cities

wonder how they will offer the basic services those dollars fund.

Cities made money via redevelopment projects by having them in special districts where the property tax was essentially frozen for the entities receiving those dollars. When the assessed value went up – aka tax increment – all that money stayed with the jurisdiction where the redevelopment occurred.

For South Lake Tahoe, that has meant more than $60 million since 1988, with another $12 million set aside for affordable housing.

City officials would argue the more than $600 million in private investment in the last 24 years would not have occurred without the redevelopment agency.

The state will take in more money by having property tax disbursements be divvied up as though redevelopment never existed. This means school districts in particular will get more money. Voters want schools to be funded at certain levels, most notably with the passage of Proposition 98. But the state has not always kept that promise. The state should have more to dole out to all levels of education with redevelopment agencies being dissolved.

But the state doesn't get that "extra" money until the debt is paid off. South Lake Tahoe has another 25 years to wipe that slate clean.

Figuring out the assets

How the city comingles its money does not help with clearly separating what goes where. When the South Lake Tahoe Redevelopment Agency was set up in 1988 it was a distinctly separate entity from the city, as required by state law. However, the people overseeing the agency have always been the City Council members, and the head of it has always been the city manager.

Instead of the agency having a simple budget, there are more than a dozen budgets within the main budget. They represent various projects.

Instead of the City Council approving two budgets – one for city business and one for redevelopment – it's all tied into one.

About $83,000 from the redevelopment budget pays for various employees in South Tahoe. The city allocates percentages from various entities to cover an employee's salary.

That cash will have to be absorbed by the general fund. But the general fund's bottom line will increase because of the way housing dollars have been allocated prior to the dissolution. The exact impact to the general fund is not known – but city officials predict it could be a net gain.

Dissolving redevelopment agencies is not as simple as redirecting where the money goes or having the state own the assets or collect the proceeds from selling them.

For a city like South Lake Tahoe, detention ponds are on the list of assets. Who would buy a stormwater facility like that? What price tag would be put on it? "Probably no one" and "who knows?" are the answers.

"Some of our assets are liabilities. They require operation and maintenance money," Councilman Hal Cole said at the Jan. 17 meeting.

The city also owns spaces in the garage at the corner of Highway 50 and Ski Run Boulevard. Diamond Resorts might be a buyer for those.

The city also owns the vacant parcel on that corner. Its value might be $1 million today. The state mandate is sell assets expeditiously and for the most amount of money. In this real estate market, those sentiments contradict one another.

The council at its Jan. 17 meeting asked for a list of assets to be available at the special meeting at the end of the month. This will also include items like computers.

Going forward

One thing in the city's favor is no one works for the redevelopment agency. This means no more job losses. However, throughout the state there is the potential of about 1,500 jobs going by the wayside, according to the California Redevelopment Association.

South Lake's agency once employed nine people. In last year's reorganization employees were reassigned even though the work of the agency went on.

What the change effective Feb. 1 means to South Tahoe is the $5.7 million it pays each year to service its redevelopment bond debt won't be able to be paid without some help. The city's tax increment collections fall about $1 million short of what's needed to pay the debt.

One thing that remains is transient occupancy tax dollars will continue to fill the gap to pay the Tax Allocation Bonds. This is because that's how the bond documents were written. As long as tax increment is insufficient, TOT will fill the gap for these bonds. This is only case in which TOT is used for debt.

Also in the must-pay column is the outstanding debt left from the $7.2 million the redevelopment agency pilfered from the general fund to make Heavenly Village a reality. The balance is $3.5 million.

In dissolving the redevelopment agencies, the state has said counties must loan the successor agencies the amount needed to pay the debt.

County governments are in no better financial shape than cities or the state, so how this will happen remains to be

seen.

An irony with El Dorado County coming to blows with the city regarding Redevelopment Area 2 is that the tax increment from that area will help the city be able to pay back the county faster.

The successor agency is the name the state has given to whoever takes over for the redevelopment agency. It does not have to be the city where the agency is. However, in South Tahoe's case, the city is the successor agency. This was done by a vote of the City Council on Sept. 27.

"One purpose of the successor agency is to pay the debt," Nancy Kerry, city redevelopment expert, told the council Jan. 17. "Money will still come in, but it is solely to pay the debt."

At a special Jan. 30 5pm council meeting the electeds will be asked to list the debts and assets of the redevelopment agency and transfer them to the successor agency. A fund must also be created to receive the tax increment and pay the debt.

The successor agency has four layers of oversight created by the state. The first is an oversight board that must be created by May 1. That board will be comprised of the mayor, a city employee appointed by the mayor, an El Dorado County supervisor, a county appointee, and one appointee each from Lake Tahoe Community College, Lake Tahoe Unified School District, and South Tahoe Public Utility District.

Successor agencies exist only until the debt is paid off. Once the debt is paid off, the taxing entities will receive their greater share of the tax increment. Essentially it goes back to pre-redevelopment shares. Those entities are members of the oversight board as well as others like Happy Homestead Cemetery District.

The other layers the state created are having the county

auditor involved, then the state Department of Finance, and the state controller as the last set of eyes.

Affordable housing

A component of redevelopment agencies is affordable housing. At the Jan. 17 council meeting, the five agreed to set up a separate housing agency.

Money tied to the disbanding of redevelopment and grants in the pipeline would fund South Lake Tahoe's housing program for one or two years. It is possible two one-time funds could come from the state to the city for housing.

Had the council not taken this action the money and program would have been transferred to the county.

It remains to be seen what will happen to the Aspens project that is planned for near the corner of Ski Run Boulevard and Pioneer Trail.

On the horizon

Three issues could alter things. One is if Senate Bill 659 passes in the next two weeks. That would postpone the dissolution of redevelopment agencies to April 15.

Senate Bill 654 would transfer the housing fund balance to a new local housing agency when redevelopment agencies are dissolved.

Cerritos has filed a lawsuit seeking an injunction of Assembly Bill 26, the redevelopment dissolution law.

With 38 pipes draining into Lake Tahoe, are lake clarity efforts worth a billion bucks?

By Anne Knowles

Current efforts to improve the clarity of Lake Tahoe are not only a waste of time and money, they are a fraud.

That's the claim made in the inaugural newsletter of the Tahoe Pipe Club, a secretive coalition of "citizen, business owners, scientists and engineers," according to its website, who are fed up with what it says is more than a billion dollars squandered on misguided scientific techniques which have failed to reduce lake turbidity.



One of 13 drains in South Lake Tahoe that reach Lake

Tahoe.
Photo/LTN file

In its newsletter and on its website, the group points to “ineffective watershed management practices,” consisting of mechanisms such as road gutters and storm drain systems, often installed in flood-prone areas that do not impact the lake.

“As justification to use lake clarity funds, the public was told that these erosion control and BMP (best management practices) retrofit projects would clean the water which they do not, and these public relations campaigns were the genesis of the hoax which persists still today,” reads the newsletter entitled “Turning Tahoe Black?”

The club advocates using infiltration methods in which stormwater is absorbed into the ground via swales and basins rather than filtered and conveyed back into the lake, and to focus on only those watersheds that have a direct link to the lake in order to best utilize dwindling lake clarity funds.

The newsletter also grades eight clarity projects based on six categories. Only the Montgomery Estates project in South Lake Tahoe received a passing grade and was judged to provide a benefit. The Luther Pass to Meyers project, for example, got an A for urban restoration, a C for hydrologic connectivity, and an F for the remaining criteria.

“The declining water quality and clarity of Lake Tahoe after spending a billion dollars and having ignored what matters most, the urban runoff from highways, streets, roads, and drainage and its discharge directly into Lake Tahoe through culverts and pipes, which account for an estimated 75 percent of the TMDL (total daily maximum load)” spurred members to form the club in 2010, John Runnels, a club member, said in an email to *Lake Tahoe News*.

The club won’t release member names or numbers. One member

using the pseudonym Tyler Durden, from the book and film "Fight Club," posts to the website and sends out the group's newsletter. In an email to *Lake Tahoe News*, he says the focus should be on the club's ideas, not its adherents.

"Pipe club is about the idea of sustainable effective urban actions to get to predevelopment clarity," Durden said in an email to *Lake Tahoe News*. "Nothing will please us more than disbanding. We agree to dissolve when our goals are met."

Those goals, as outlined at the website, include replacing conveyance-based approaches to water quality with infiltration methods, stopping unnecessary river realignment, no more land coverage tracking for water quality purposes, and an end to road sweeping and the paving of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The club gets its name from the hundreds of drain pipes that feed into the lake, which the group is documenting in photos and videos at its website and in annual calendars.

"This 2012 Lake Tahoe Storm Drain Calendar is dedicated to the hundreds of urban outfall pipes which chronically discharge toxic storm water directly into the perennial streams of Lake Tahoe and Lake Tahoe itself every time it rains or snows," reads the website.

The group has identified 38 pipes it says are a priority: 13 in South Lake Tahoe, including the three El Dorado pipes; 10 in McKinney Bay; four in Tahoe Pines; three in Kings Beach; two in Incline Village; and one each in Carnelian Bay, Marla Bay, Meeks Bay, Sunnyside, Tahoe Vista and Tahoma.

"The pipe club is compiling all this evidence of pipes putting dirty water into the lake," said Dylan Eichenberg, a senior at UC Berkeley who is studying conservation and resource management, grew up in Tahoma and supports the pipe club's goals. "The pipes are by far one of the most significant impacts on the lake."

Eichenberg is not a member of the club, but knows some of its members, has followed its work and supports it, and studied the same issues for his term paper entitled “Urban Impacts on Lake Tahoe”. He would like to see what he calls “rain gardens” installed at the lake, which stormwater would flow into instead of storm drains.

“There could be trenches or basins every couple blocks as needed,” Eichenberg said.

Tahoe Pipe Club is also routinely taking Secchi depth measurements and posting the results to Twitter and Facebook. Secchi depth measurements gauge water clarity using a dinner-dish sized-disk lowered into the water. Clarity is measured at the depth at which the disk is last visible to the naked eye.

The club hopes by posting the data and other related science it can raise public consciousness on the issue and influence lake clarity work and the resources supporting it. The group has no plans to raise money or initiate projects, and it does not attend public meetings such as the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, although it keeps the TRPA informed of its work.

For its part, the TRPA says it is aware of the group but defends its focus on water quality treatment based on the existing conveyance approach.

“TRPA appreciates Tahoe Pipe Club’s dedication to the water quality of Lake Tahoe,” the TRPA said in a statement provided to *Lake Tahoe News*. “The problem is not what comes out of the pipes, but what goes in. That is why TRPA is committed to supporting environmental redevelopment projects that include erosion control efforts for treating stormwater runoff in our built environment, from which science tells us is where 72 percent of the pollution entering Lake Tahoe comes. As water quality science evolves, TRPA will continue to support the most effective techniques for treating storm water on both public and private property.”

Seismic deficiencies require changes to Fanny Bridge

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – News that a main sewer line may possibly run under where the intersection of highways 28 and 89 in Tahoe City could be relocated came as a surprise to transportation officials.

Marcia Beals, general manager for the Tahoe-Truckee Sanitation Agency, dropped this piece of information on the Advisory Planning Commission of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency at the Jan. 11 meeting.

She was one of nine people to share her views and concerns about altering the highway configuration to accommodate Fanny Bridge. Fanny Bridge has been deemed seismically unsafe for a state highway.



Fanny Bridge

in Tahoe City
does not meet
seismic
standards.

“We’ve looked at relocation concepts and have difficulties in how that could be done,” Beals told the board.

Jeff Smith, a consulting engineer for the sewer district, pointed out there could be problems with manhole covers, the weight from the road placed on the lines, and if a rupture occurred during construction what that would mean to contaminating the Truckee River.

After the meeting Tahoe Transportation District officials spoke briefly with Beals and Smith, with the plan to have more in depth discussions soon.

At this stage, all lines on a map are rough and no decisions about a route have been made.

Originally five alternatives were proposed by the Tahoe Transportation District to reroute highway traffic from this busy intersection and off the bridge that crosses the Truckee River.

Two other alternatives were introduced at the APC meeting from comments brought forward at the two scoping meetings in December.

“There’s a lot of conflict in that area,” Alfred Knotts, TTD planner, told the APC board.

One alternative is the standard do nothing. That alternative could bring load restrictions for trucks crossing it – which in turn could affect commerce along the West Shore.

Some alternatives have a section of Highway 89 running along the lake becoming a road Placer County would own, with a

bypass going through 64 acres owned by the U.S. Forest Service to the west to connect with Highway 89 farther west of the current Y in Tahoe City.

One idea is to not allow any traffic crossing Highway 89. This would create a more pedestrian, bike friendly area.

Another is to build a bigger, more stable bridge.

“A new or improved bridge would reflect that cultural value,” Knotts said.

Roger Kahn, who owns two parcels at the Tahoe City Y, would have preferred TTD staff met with him and others whose property are likely to be affected.

He said closing the road would have a huge economic impact at that end of Tahoe City. The Bank of the West branch manager echoed that concern.

Leigh Cullen said she’s concerned if Placer County is responsible for Fanny Bridge that necessary repairs won’t be made.

Richard Courcier took issue with studies that say part of the project is designed to relieve congestion, when in fact he said it’s only busy in July and August at the Y. He also said having two roads – not closing off the bridge – would be better to help on high traffic days.

He owns the rafting company that operates on the Truckee River. Courcier said shutting Fanny Bridge off to vehicle traffic would create more vehicle miles traveled by anyone coming up the West Shore wanting to go into the heart of Tahoe City.

The APC board took no action last week.

Comments on the Fanny Bridge project are being taken until Jan. 30. Documents are on TTD’s website.

All of the alternatives will be studied in the environmental impact statement, environmental impact report, and environmental assessment. It’s expected a draft of the three environmental documents will be released in the fall for a 60-day comment period. The final EIS/EIS/EA could come out in the first quarter of 2013. Project approval would be on target by summer 2013, with construction possible in 2015.