Legality of Fallen Leaf Lake board members still murky

By Jessie Marchesseau

Even though no votes were actually cast, Tom Barber, Wanda Kownacki, David Stumbos and Stephanie Neidig will be sworn into their seats on the Fallen Leaf Lake Community Services District board of directors next month.

But there is still a question as to whether any of them can legitimately hold the positions.

The candidates did not appear on any ballots because all four ran unopposed. Barber, Kownacki and Stumbos will maintain their positions as directors, while Neidig is stepping into the vacant seat.



Fallen Leaf Lake CSD directors Tom Bacchetti and Wanda Kownacki will continue to sit on the board. Photo/Jessie Marchesseau

The question of legitimacy, however, has nothing to do with

the election. Rather, it stems from the voter fraud issues Fallen Leaf Lake residents have been plagued with for more than a year.

> Some area homeowners are doubtful whether any of these candidates can actually legally register to vote within the district. If not, they could be ineligible to hold office. Article II, Section A of the Fallen Leaf Lake CSD bylaws states: “The District shall be governed by a Board of Directors of five (5) members. Each Director shall be registered to vote within the district.”

Fallen Leaf Lake CSD director and president, Tom Bacchetti, said he and all of the other directors are currently registered to vote within the district. However, El Dorado County Assistant District Attorney Hans Uthe expressed that simply being registered does not necessarily make it legal.

“Someone can register, and that makes them eligible until the court tells them they’re not,” Uthe told *Lake Tahoe News*.

So even though they may be currently registered to vote within the district, the question remains as to whether or not that registration is legal.

While some community members have expressed their concern over the issue to the El Dorado County Elections Department and District Attorney’s Office, both entities state that it is not their place to determine eligibility of candidates or to remove them from office.

Uthe said he has made it clear to everyone who has contacted him regarding this issue that they have two remedies to the solution. They can seek a civil remedy by bringing the issue before a civil court, or they can file a complaint with the California Secretary of State.

For now, the District Attorney’s Office has completed its investigation and is offering no further insight about the

issue. However, a complaint to the Secretary of State could trigger another investigation and possible criminal charges.

Meanwhile, there still seems to be some misinformation circulating within the Fallen Leaf Lake community.

At the board of directors' meeting Nov. 5, Bacchetti announced the District Attorney's Office would accept letters from residents declaring Fallen Leaf Lake their domicile in order to rectify any question regarding legal voter registration within the district.

Uthe, on the other hand, said that his office has not solicited any such letters or made any such agreement. A letter, he said, cannot determine the issue of legal domicile.

"That someone would claim to be abiding by the law doesn't necessarily mean they are," Uthe said.

The idea of domicile can be somewhat complicated, he said, but what it basically comes down to is where a person actually lives.

With so many second homeowners in Fallen Leaf Lake, that still leaves them with the issue of residents being able to vote on key issue within the district.

"The only way that this is going to get solved is legislation," Bill Schultz, El Dorado County registrar of voters said. "Fallen Leaf Lake is not the only CSD with this problem."

So a group of Fallen Leaf Lake homeowners is taking it upon themselves to get just such a bill passed. Mike Cathcart is one of these homeowners. He said the group has agreed on language for their proposal and met with individuals in Sacramento to take the necessary steps to get the proposal introduced and hopefully passed by the Legislature.

Cathcart and the rest of the group have focused their proposal

specifically toward voters in Fallen Leaf Lake. However, Schultz believes statewide legislation would be the key to clearing up similar voting issues in CSDs across the state.

But for now, Fallen Leaf Lake residents are left to make their own determinations as to whether or not they are legally able to register to vote within the district and trust their board of directors to do the same.

Shakeup on STPUD board, Measure R passes soundly

By Kathryn Reed

Two new faces will be on the South Tahoe Public Utility District board, incumbents are returning to Lake Tahoe Unified and Lake Tahoe Community College boards, and the recreation measure on the South Shore is officially R.

Kelly Sheehan came out of the gate with 65.13 percent of the vote compared to incumbent Dale Rise's 34.4 percent.

A clearly emotional Sheehan was cautiously optimistic with the initial results. But others near her wondered if it was mathematically possible for her to even lose at that point. She wasn't ready to claim victory at that point no matter what others said to her.



Randy Vogelgesang and Kelly Sheehan celebrate their victory Nov. 8 at Steamers. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Sheehan had invited all of the utility district candidates to her bar-restaurant, Steamers. Rise was the only one not to show up Election Night. Nor did he return a call for comment.

Sheehan and Randy Vogelgesang spent part of the night huddled together – the voters' top choices. Neither had run for any political office before being on the Nov. 8 ballot.

Vogelgesang replaces Marylou Mosbacher who did not seek re-election.

He said he is humbled by the win.

Vogelgesang held on to the lead absentee voters gave him. With numbers coming out just after polls closed at 8pm, Vogelgesang led with 37.71 percent, Claude Gunsch 28.55 percent, John Runnels 20.9 percent, and Mary Kortge 12.63 percent.

With absentees accounting for the 18.9 percent turnout in early returns, El Dorado County Registrar of Voters Bill Schultz was not surprised. This, despite the county's growth in absentee voting for each election.

“With this election, everything’s gonna be low,” he told *Lake Tahoe News* at 10:05pm, about 15 minutes after the votes from the lake showed up at the county offices in Placerville.

By the time the final vote was tallied at 11:11pm, the numbers are below with the winners in bold:

STPUD Seat 3:

Vogelgesang – 37.18 percent, 1,128 votes

Gunsch – 28.54 percent, 866 votes

Runnels – 21.29 percent, 646 votes

Kortge – 12.82 percent, 389 votes

STPUD Seat 4:

Sheehan – 66.39 percent, 1,989 votes

Rise – 33.24 percent, 996 votes

LTUSD:

Sue Novasel – 32.73 percent, 2,283 votes

Larry Green – 29.23 percent, 2,039 votes

Michael Doyle – 27.69 percent, 1,932 votes

Michael Bischoff – 9.91 percent, 691 votes

LTCC:

Karen Borges – 49.47 percent, 2,524 votes

Fritz Wenck – 37.36 percent, 1,906 votes

Michael Bischoff – 12.54 percent, 640 votes.

All of these numbers are unofficial until certified, which can take up to 30 days. Board members will take their seats in

December.

Schultz pointed out that the turnout could have been even lower if not for measures that get out the vote among a community's most motivated citizens.

"In an off year, I really think it's the passion behind whatever initiative there happens to be," he said. "I think it's whatever's personal."

In the South Shore's case, Measure R – a rewrite of the recreation initiative Measure S of 2000 – made the ballot.

R needed a two-thirds majority to pass – which it more than achieved with 70.19 percent or 2,234 votes compared to the opposition that had 949 votes for 29.81 percent.

For Schultz, it has been difficult losing Assistant Registrar Norma Gray, a 31-year county employee who became a fixture in the Elections Department. A picture of her hangs in the kitchen as a "jewel of her memory," Schultz said. She died in December.

– Susan Wood contributed to this story.

Code enforcement becoming a priority for South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Inconsistent code enforcement in South Lake Tahoe may be rectified soon.

The City Council at a workshop last week was given an update

by staff on where the city stands in streamlining this issue.



Hilary Roverud, Development Services director, told the electeds developing a dedicated code enforcement division will help bring consistency to enforcement. It's too soon to say what that division would look like.

But the problem today is community service officers, the building division, engineering and streets divisions, planning, fire, and finance all are required to enforce various city codes. Therein lies the inconsistency with when things are enforced and the consequences associated with infractions.

Another reason to have staff dedicated to enforcement is that with fewer people working for the city, enforcement is often driven by complaints.

"When you have inconsistent enforcement, you tend to have more violations," Roverud said.

Right now many people violating some policy have multiple avenues to keep appealing the process and never paying a dime to tie up staff time.

To put some teeth into various codes staff is recommending fines be upfront, with the violators able to be refunded the payment if they win their case.

"It would be modeled after parking where they are fined. They can have a hearing. There is one single appeal," Roverud said. "The idea here is to have one appeal opportunity. Who that appeal would go to is open for discussion."

Mayor Hal Cole said he would like to look into hiring a part-time employee dedicated to making sure vacation rentals are paying their transient occupancy tax and other city fees, with

the rationale that the income collected would more than pay that person's wages.

"It's a priority to me because of the lost revenue," Cole said.

Roverud said while finding the properties online is one thing; it is catching people violating the rules that can be more problematic and time consuming.

On a side note, Police Chief Brian Uhler said 38 locations have been identified since March and are now paying up. But he admitted it is an "involved process."

City Attorney Patrick Enright said, "We do need seed money to start the process." The process being a dedicated enforcement division.

The theory is the pot of cash would be a revolving fund that would constantly fund itself via fines not currently being collected, paying for the work not currently being done.

"The idea is to take a few key priorities and simplify things," Uhler said. As the program evolves more codes could be added to the list for the team to enforce.

City Manager Tony O'Rourke said public safety issues should be No. 1 on the list of enforcement issues.

Uhler, who is also the fire chief this fiscal year, said it's a priority for him to have a fire code officer. A report released earlier this fall was highly critical of South Lake Tahoe's fire code enforcement.

Staff will refine some of its ideas, with possible changes to how enforcement is done and potential creation of a separate division to be on a future council agenda.

Highway 50 may be routed through neighborhoods

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Turning Highway 50 near and through the casino corridor into a city street and the roads from Pioneer Trail behind Raley's at the state line into a state highway may one day be a reality.

Known locally as the Loop Road project, officials are now trying to get people to call it the Highway 50 South Shore Community Revitalization Project.



Highway 50 going east beyond Pioneer Trail near the state line could become a city street. Photo/LTN

There was a time when the highway was to be rerouted behind all of the main Stateline casinos. Now the project only involves the mountainside of the loop road – what goes behind Harrah's and MontBleu.

The thinking is it would not be wise to keep the state highway between the lake and casinos; that’s why it is not taking a western loop.

Also originally talked about was starting the realignment at Heavenly Village Way/Park Avenue. That has been scrapped to now start at the intersection of Highway 50 and Pioneer Trail. The alignment would somewhat follow the shortcut locals take to avoid driving through the casino corridor.

This would mean turning what are now city streets into a five-lane highway – two lanes in each direction, with a middle turn lane. The casino area would be three lanes – one in each direction with a middle turn lane.

Where Lake Parkway hooks up with Highway 50 near MontBleu could become a roundabout.

Reasons for the change

Highlights of the project were touched on by Carl Hasty, executive director for Tahoe Transportation District – lead agency on the project, at the Nov. 4 joint South Lake Tahoe City Council-Douglas County Commission meeting at Edgewood Tahoe.

Hasty told that group one advantage to the preferred alternative is the street in front of the casinos could more easily be closed off for special events. This would avoid nightmares like a few years ago when Highway 50 was shutdown for Opening Days Lake Tahoe.

Michael Olson, chairman of the county commission, said he likes the idea. “It would create a Tahoe experience.”

Hasty said studies show two-thirds of the highway traffic has a destination other than the casinos or Heavenly Village, so rerouting them would not take them away from their end point.

People would still be able to access the casinos as they do

now – on either side of the structures.

While three alternatives are proposed (one is to do nothing), the above scenario is what transportation officials' support.

Meetings begin this week to gather input from the public. Written comments will be taken until Dec. 16. The scoping document provides more details.

All of this ties into the South Shore Vision Plan – making the area from Ski Run Boulevard to Kahle Drive more user friendly. But the Loop Road project has been talked about for decades, while the former is a new concept.

Eliminating people's homes

To do what proponents want would mean displacing a number of people, along with businesses at the corner of the highway and Pioneer Trail. It's a residential community on the back roads that would become a state highway.

Hasty said when the time comes property owners would be offered fair market value.

When asked about how South Lake Tahoe's eminent domain policy plays into their thinking, he told *Lake Tahoe News*, "It could stop the project."

He also added, "Do you pay more than market value or do you not do the project?"

The City Council in 2007 passed a resolution, with an addendum added in March 2008, that essentially bans eminent domain from being used in the city limits. While there was talk of requiring the issue be taken to the voters for the policy to be overturned, that never got written into the resolution. But the council could still make it be a contingency factor for the project to go forward.

Mayor Hal Cole told *Lake Tahoe News* when Hasty made a

presentation a year ago to the council, the eminent domain issue came up.

“They know how the city feels,” Cole said of project proponents.

The city resolution specifically talks about not using eminent domain to displace low- and moderate-income residents living in any type of dwelling.

Property owners have been mailed information about the project. Tenants are expected to receive a flyer this week. But that is just days from the Nov. 10 TTD board meeting – not giving people much time to rearrange their schedule if they were wanting to attend.

Relocation law demands people displaced via eminent domain be relocated. Hasty said that is the plan. Specifics have not been detailed, but Hasty said housing would be found for people in the general area. After all, many of those people have limited incomes and walk to work.

Hasty also said the project is still a long way from being a reality.

It’s estimated to cost close to $70 million. That price tag includes acquisition and relocation expenses. TTD would like to apply for federal grants in a year if the project is shovel ready by then. That would mean having the environmental documents completed.

Besides getting the city to agree to the project, Douglas County will have to say yes. So will Caltrans and the Nevada Department of Transportation.

Hasty said the two state transportation agencies have been approached and have participated in discussions. But this is a local project, not something either state is spearheading.

Dates to know:

• Nov. 10 at 1pm, Tahoe Transportation District board meeting at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency board room, 128 Market St., Stateline.

• Dec. 7 at 9:30am, TRPA Advisory Planning Commission meeting at the TRPA board room, 128 Market St., Stateline.

• Dec. 16 is the last day to submit comments on the scoping document.

Sierra eliminates the hike to resort's extreme terrain

By Kathryn Reed

Adrenaline junkies will want to head to Sierra-at-Tahoe this winter because of the exclusive snowcat-guide provided trek to and through Huckleberry Canyon.

These 320 acres of expert terrain first became patrolled with avalanche prevention measures put in place for the 2008-09 season. Now, three years later, the resort near Echo Summit is making it a bit more accessible.



Huckleberry Canyon at Sierra will be

easier to get
to this
season.
Photo/Provided

Gate 5 is about a 1½-mile hike for the more intrepid skier or boarder. Paying $79 (not including lift ticket) will get riders to the starting point via snowcat. The 10am-2pm Friday-Sunday excursions include lunch, avalanche beacon, probe and a guide for seven people. One cat will go out each of those days when conditions permit.

“The idea behind it is to get people out to the backcountry for the joy of floating through powder,” Steve Hemphill, spokesman for the resort, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Some people are not sure they want to hike for their turns.”

Cliff drops, shoots, gladed trees – Huckleberry’s terrain runs the gamut.

On the other spectrum of the industry, Sierra is creating a snowboarding program for ages 3 to 6. Riglet Park, which will be operated in conjunction with Burton, will be near the base of the Grandview chair.

Hemphill said there has been a void in the industry in regards to getting the younger kids on snowboards.

The Burton Riglet Wheel looks like a hockey puck on the front of the snowboard. Instructors use it to pull the their charges.

“It gives them the feel for sliding on snow while the instructor does most of the work. It teaches them balance control and movement of what it is like to snowboard,” Hemphill said.

Robert Alward has taken over as director of the school.

With little snowmaking at the resort, Sierra depends on Mother Nature to set the opening date. Usually it’s as close to Thanksgiving as possible.

To spur things along, the annual Pray for Snow Party is Nov. 10 at MontBleu in Stateline. The free event is open to passholders at 6pm, and to everyone else at 7pm.

A variety of season passes exist, but just to Sierra. This is the first time in decades the resort is flying solo. With Northstar being acquired by Vail Resorts a year ago, the Double Whammy pass is a thing of the past. But Sierra still has its three-pack of tickets that through Dec. 16 are $51 per ticket – which can be used any day. Then they go up to $54/day. This compares to the regular lift ticket of $74 a day – $77 during peak times.

Sierra has a slew of events planned for the 2011-12 season. Details are online.

Don’t be surprised to see snowboarder Jaime Anderson cutting it up at the resort. Sierra remains her home resort. She often Tweets when she’s at her home mountain.

Sierra is negotiating with snowboarder Hannah Teeter as to whether the Vermont native will keep training at the South Shore resort.

For those who aren’t into strapping a plank or two to their feet, Blizzard Mountain is a snow play-tubing area at Sierra that has been expanded to include a bounce house, snack bar, fire pits, picnic tables and sledding.

State finally prevails – Kindertown day care closed

By Kathryn Reed

Kindertown Day Care and Preschool will not open Monday. It may never open again, at least not with Maria Barrows-Crist as owner-operator.

Officials from the California Department of Social Services showed up at the South Lake Tahoe center Friday about lunchtime with an order from a judge stating the center would be closed at the end of business Nov. 4.

“Thirty-nine kids over the weekend will have to find alternate care,” Barrows-Crist told *Lake Tahoe News* through tears.



Community efforts to keep Kindertown open ultimately were not enough. Photo/LTN file

She looks at the pictures on the walls in the center, of the people who have supported her for the past 33 years – and especially in the past two years during her licensing

struggles – and she feels she has let them down.

“I feel like such a failure,” Barrows-Crist. “I really did fight.”

When troubles first started, Kindertown received money from the state as well as private funding. She had 130 children and 20 employees in September 2009.

About 7,000 kids have come through the doors since Judy Kurtzman first opened Kindertown on July 1, 1973. Barrows-Crist is the third owner.

Her saga with the state began in September 2009 when the officials tried to close the facility based on a series of allegations. Each time Barrows-Crist wins in court the state comes up with more charges. This time, though, the state won. That hasn’t happened before during all of this back-and-forth legal maneuvering.

Officials from the state were not available for comment late Friday afternoon.

Barrows-Crist said she was caught off-guard because she didn’t believe anything would happen until the Nov. 18 hearing before El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Warren Stracener in Placerville. In October he ruled there is no harm keeping Kindertown open until his decision is made later this month.

But the state took the case to the appellate court, which said the center should be closed until Stracener makes his ruling.

So, it’s possible Kindertown could open again Nov. 21 if she were to win in two weeks. But by then parents will have found alternative care for their children and the five employees may have moved on as well.

Plus, Barrows-Crist is now representing herself in court because she can’t pay what she owes attorney Mike McLaughlin and therefore has no money for any legal counsel. McLaughlin

could not be reached Friday.

The state said they would notify the families by phone and provided Barrows-Crist with a letter to give families as well. The one thing she felt good about Friday was reaching most of the parents before the state did.

If this closure is permanent, Barrows-Crist hopes a buyer will come forward soon. The business has been on the market for a number of months.

Bankruptcy, Barrows-Crist said, may be her next experience with the courts.

Treetop adventure park in the works for South Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Monkeying around is being encouraged.

“I went through a Go Ape course in England. We went through it twice because we liked it so much,” Sherry Miller, who runs Lake Tahoe Airport, said. “It’s a high-rope course. It’s a fantastic outdoor activity for everybody.”

Such a course, which includes ziplines, is expected to open at the South Lake Tahoe airport next year. The city’s Airport Commission approved the idea at its Nov. 3 meeting. The City Council is expected to approve the contract at its Nov. 15 meeting.



A treetop adventure park is expected to open at Lake Tahoe Airport in 2012. Photo/Go Ape

It’s essentially a high-wire forest adventure course.

“Our first interest is to create an opportunity for our guests to enjoy something unique, something that supports and symbolizes the natural environment here,” City Manager Tony O’Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Officials from the Maryland-based company were not available for comment late Thursday. While they were not at the meeting this week, representatives have been at previous Airport Commission meetings touting how they could transform several acres of the airport into an eco-adventure for locals and tourists.

The tentative 15-year agreement has Go Ape leasing 12 acres of the airport starting near the tower. (That would mark the south end of the course.) The contract start date would be Nov. 15 if council approves it. Rent would likely start being collected April 1, 2012, in the amount of $2,000 a month, going up based on the Consumer Price Index. The city will also be paid a part of the gross revenues, with the plan calling for 2 percent in year one and maxing out at 11 percent in year six.

Estimates are the city could make more than $100,000 a year off the adventure by the fifth year.

It would probably be open six to seven months, and not in the winter to begin with.

It takes six weeks to set up the course. They are considered semi-permanent, so they can be taken down if need be. Trees are protected so their growth is not stunted.

Platforms will be built into the trees. These launch pads are where people jump from or start their trek along wobbly ropes.

Miller was almost giddy describing the fun she has had on one of Go Ape's courses in the U.K. Wearing a harness and strapped to a cable, people are not going to fall no matter how sweaty their palms get.

Four to six sections are in each course. It's expected one course will be built in South Lake Tahoe. Each of Go Ape's courses occupies 6 to 9 acres.

With the company limiting the number of people who can use the course at any given time, it's not expected to add tremendously to traffic issues on Highway 50. At its other facilities, reservations are the norm.

Parking is not solidified. It will likely either be near the non-functioning control tower or in the main lot of the airport.

While Go Ape cannot fell any trees without the city's permission, this area is slated to be thinned. Miller said the Go Ape officials will be notified which trees are likely to removed so as its design team creates the course, they know which trees will be standing when it comes time to build the apparatus.

The airport tower, which has not been used in years by the FAA, could become Go Ape's offices and storage site.

The Federal Aviation Administration still has equipment there, so that would need to be removed. Plus, the FAA must sign off on the idea once the council gives its blessing.

“Typically the FAA doesn’t like park-type things on airport property, but this is land that cannot be used by aircraft,” Miller told *Lake Tahoe News*. “In our land use plans this is an approved use.”

Miller said Tahoe Regional Planning Agency staff has been part of discussions and is working with everyone to make this become a reality.

“We can’t wait until they get here. We’re fighting over who is the first one to go on course,” Miller said.

Royal Gorge ski area, Rainbow Lodge for sale

By Tim Hauserman

Royal Gorge Cross Country Ski Area, including more than 3,000 acres on Donner Summit and the Rainbow Lodge along the Yuba River, is being put up for sale this month by a court appointed receiver.

The receiver, Douglas Wilson, took possession of the property after the owners of Royal Gorge defaulted on a $16.7 million loan on the property. It is the end of a short, tumultuous chapter in the history of what is known as the largest cross country ski resort in North America, a centerpiece of the Donner Summit community.

How did this happen?



Royal Gorge plans to operate this winter, but it is for sale.

In 2005, developers Kirk Syme and two brothers, Mark and Todd Foster, purchased Royal Gorge from its long-time owner and original developer, John Slouber. They paid a reported $35 million and set out to get approval for a cross country ski area based development that would include 900 residential units, several small lakes, retail and restaurant establishments and several new lifts.

Things didn't work out like they had planned. They had difficulty finding enough water and sewage capacity. Public officials said they would need to build a second access road to the development because the current two-lane road that goes over a busy railroad track would be insufficient in an emergency.

Then there were those "Save Donner Summit" bumper stickers which popped up everywhere as folks on the summit railed loudly against the development.

But the nail in the coffin was the real estate bust. With a built up inventory of luxury golf course homes in nearby Truckee it is hard to picture someone beginning a 900 unit residential and commercial development at this point in the economic cycle.

What happens to the ski area?

Douglas Wilson's managing director for Brokerage Services, Tom Olson, says the receiver will keep Royal Gorge Cross Country operating and will maintain the level of service. Royal Gorge General Manager David Achey agrees, stating that the receiver has been supportive of the ski area.

"We got guys painting, doing maintenance, summer trail work, looking into signage, maintaining grooming fleet. We are putting out a great product," Achey told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This year Royal Gorge will allow dogs on several trails for the first time. The Wells-Fargo and Emigrant trails will form a dog friendly loop on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Olson says the property is being put up for sale for $24 million and is being marketed extensively internationally. The receiver is contacting cross country and downhill ski resorts, as well as individuals who in the past have purchased large parcels for conservation purposes. In addition to the 3,000 acres of Royal Gorge, which includes the Summit Station building and a number of huts along the trail, the sale also includes Rainbow Lodge with its 114 acres along the Yuba River and about 300 acres of land in Negro Canyon above Donner Lake.

One party that has already expressed interest in the property is the Truckee Donner Land Trust. Trust Executive Director Perry Norris said his group has been interested in the Royal Gorge property for more than 20 years, especially the environmentally sensitive Van Norden meadow. Norris says the trust sees the best use of the land is for conservation, not development, and to keep the cross country center operating.

He doesn't believe the value for the property is $24 million, however.

"We are banking that at the end of the day the bank that is foreclosing on the property will see us as the best and strongest buyer. They had a very competent developer who tried to develop the property for six years and he didn't move it

one inch closer to the goal line," Norris said.

Long-awaited Harrison Ave. upgrades in works in S. Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

While South Lake Tahoe is never likely to have a downtown based on how haphazardly the city was allowed to develop and that the main road is a state highway, another five blocks are about to be removed from the blighted category.

Harrison Avenue between Los Angeles and Lakeview avenues is ranked No. 2 on the city's list of priorities for capital improvement projects.



The dirt area will become diagonal parking, Harrison Avenue (on the right) will be one-way, and sidewalks along Highway

50 are already in (not shown).
Photo/LTN file

No drastic changes are proposed from what has been talked about for the last 14 years. But the funding to do the complete streets overhaul is still not in place. The price tag in 2006 was at least $1 million. The total amount today is projected to be $1,625,844.

The bulk of that money ($805,770) is likely to come from the certificate of participation bond the council will vote on and likely execute early next year.

Money is starting to trickle in. At the Nov. 1 City Council meeting the five electeds accepted $275,074 from the Tahoe Metropolitan Planning Organization's Regional Surface Transportation Program to begin the planning and design of Harrison Avenue.

"We think the economy has persuaded business owners to look at things differently now," Jim Marino, South Lake Tahoe capital improvement project manager, said.

In the past, the owners on this frontage street paralleling Highway 50 have dragged their feet. Coverage is a big concern, along with parking.

What has been on the books for years are what the city is going with – making Harrison Avenue one-way, diagonal parking, sidewalks and a class 1 bike trail.

Part of the bid package for the project includes looking at forming a business improvement district, much like what the Ski Run area has.

Mayor Hal Cole is concerned if one property owner disagrees with the plans that the whole project will be doomed. With a

BID, that is less likely to happen.

A design proposal is expected to be presented to the council at the Nov. 15 meeting.

Marino said business and property owners have been involved in design aspects.

With Caltrans this summer-fall putting in curbs and gutters along this stretch of the highway, the transformation has begun. Plus, the area ties into all the improvements being done at Lakeview Commons.

In waiting this long to actually move forward, the California Tahoe Conservancy has changed its mind about the parcel it owns next to the *Tahoe Daily Tribune* building. It is now willing to swap it for the land the city owns on Glenwood Avenue where the old drive-in was. The city would use the Harrison land for parking.

Marino expects to have Harrison Avenue be a shovel-ready project in 2012, with building starting the following construction season.

In other action:

• A contract with Clean Tahoe Program that ends Sept. 30, 2015, was signed, with the contingency an audit or review of the books is done this year because one has not been done since 2008.

• An agreement was signed with Nichols Consulting Engineers to begin the planning process of putting in sidewalks on Pioneer Trail between Highway 50 and Larch Avenue.

• The city is paying nearly $35,000 to equip the snow removal fleet with GPS navigation systems. It will cost the city nearly $6,000 a year to keep the system running. The point of it according the staff report is to provide “greater flexibility in vehicle assignments for the streets

superintendent.” The public will also be able to view snow removal by neighborhood or street.

• A two-year contract with the Stationary Engineers, Local 39 was approved. Those general and public works employees will pay 4 percent of their PERS contribution this fiscal year and the full 8 percent in 2012-13. No COLAs are part of the deal. They agreed to changes in the health care plan which would take effect when all other groups sign-off on that aspect of the deal.

Nation’s lone bi-state park a success based on popularity

By Kathryn Reed

Closed, but not off limits. That’s the status of Van Sickle Bi-state Park as of sunset Monday.

Considering the traffic to the nation’s first and only bi-state park exceeded expectations, it may come as a surprise to some people the gates won’t be open again for six months.



Van Sickle Bi-state Park in its first season is

popular with locals and tourists. Photo/LTN file

The park near the state line on the South Shore was always intended to be open seasonally. Although this was a short season, with the park opening July 22, the plan is for it to be open each May through October – without snow.

People may still walk in. Driving is no longer an option. It's possible people will use the park to snowshoe and cross country ski, but no trail markers are set up.

The caretakers will continue to live on-site so someone is keeping an eye out on things.

In this inaugural season, locals and tourists have been flocking to the 725-acre park.

"It's good when locals adopt a place like that and they adopt it as part of their culture," Ray Lacey, deputy director of the California Tahoe Conservancy, said. "It's been astonishing and delightful for us how popular it has become."

When officials are out there they ask people where they are from to get a feel for who is on the trails. Local running groups are scampering up the dirt trails that lead to some magnificent views of Lake Tahoe.

Official user counts will be done next year.

Trail maps and interpretive signs are in the works, but not guaranteed for next summer.

"Explore Tahoe really has had the opportunity to be an urban trailhead now," Lisa O'Daly, program supervisor with CTC, said. "They are incredible at letting people know the adventure going on outside their door so they can walk

straight to the park.”

Explore Tahoe is in the Heavenly Village area, providing outdoor info to urbanites.

The Conservancy and Nevada State Parks are the owners of the bi-state park, while the Tahoe Rim Trail Association has contributed substantially to the operation and trail building.

“The connector up to the Rim Trail is not completed in the sense that it is smooth and 100 percent built to standard yet,” Mary Bennington, TRTA executive director, said. “About one mile in the middle has been roughed in. You could hike it, but that part will be harder because it is not really finished.”

The idea is from the South Shore’s main bed base people will be able to hook up with the Tahoe Rim Trail at the Daggett Summit-Kingsbury Grade area.

Bennington expects the connector be done sometime in summer 2012. With the upper section not being able to be accessed until July because of snow, it made it impossible to have enough time this season to get the work done.