SLT, EDC approve garbage rate hikes

South Lake Tahoe electeds on Tuesday voted for the full garbage rate increase, while El Dorado County officials decided to stagger the fee.

The Waste Management Joint Powers Authority board in November approved South Tahoe Refuse bills to go up Jan. 1 in South Lake Tahoe by 8.81 percent, El Dorado County 9.34 percent and Douglas County 6.81 percent. On a monthly residential bill this would equate to an increase of $2.34 to $28.89, $2.85 to $33.32 and $1.21 to $18.93, respectively.

The JPA gave the individual jurisdictions the option to increase the bill starting in 2018 or to spread it over two years.

How the city noticed the rate increase it was such that what the elected were faced with was the full fee increase. They weren't happy with not having the choice. So much so that Councilwoman Brooke Laine on Dec. 12 voted no, though she was the only one to do so.

The county on the other hand had the option to space the increase out – and that's what it did. So, the immediate hike will be 6.26 percent in 2018 and 3.08 the following year.

Douglas County commissioners still need to vote on the increase.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Clock ticking to find shelter for Tahoe's homeless

By Kathryn Reed

The overnight low in South Lake Tahoe last night was supposed to be 15 degrees. There were residents who were outside, in a vehicle or in other substandard housing.

That is going to keep happening until the warm room is able to open. Now in its third year, the facility could open New Year's Day with about 25 cots.

The delay is the lack of a facility.

The South Lake Tahoe City Council took steps Dec. 12 to do something about this situation. The city owns a vacant building on Rufus Allen Boulevard that used to be rented by Unity at the Lake. A few improvements would need to be made to the structure first.



To help with warm room costs, checks may be made payable to Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless and mailed to PO Box 13514, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151 or go online. To get a list of what the warm needs in terms of

donations, contact tahoewarmroom@gmail.com or 775.573.0822.

But the main obstacle is appeasing neighbors who think these men and women are a threat to them and their children. A task force was put together to quickly mitigate concerns. Lake Tahoe Unified School District and Lake Tahoe Boys and Girls Club will be part of the team to find solutions because they have facilities within walking distance.

People are concerned about the proximity to a school bus stop, the recreation center, senior center, library, school and Boys and Girls Club. They don't want these people loitering or committing crimes.

The naysayers tried to paint a picture of these people being scary criminals. Statistics from the past two years show no evidence of that being a true characterization.

It was repeatedly pointed out that homeless people as a group are not law breakers, they are financially challenged. Some have mental health issues, some substance problems.

The warm room has an in-take form that asks if they are sex offenders. They self-report – just like they are supposed to do with law enforcement. If they say, yes, they are turned away. Guests must abide by rules at the warm room – like not drinking or using other drugs. If they do, they are shown the door.

Leigh Wayne Miller, a doctor in town, was one of the overnight workers at the warm room last year. This meant staying with the 25 guests overnight – alone. She'd do it again.

This week she saw three women who were admitted to the hospital, all talking about suicide. Miller said they all felt hopeless, were cold and didn't think they could handle another night in the elements.

“There is an empty building. We need to get people inside sooner rather than later,” Miller said.

Assuming a compromise is found, the council gave direction to staff to devise a contract. It would have the Tahoe Homeless Coalition pay about $5,000 in rent for the four-month period, of which the city would then use those funds for its hard costs related to the operation. This would include utilities, possibly security and maybe a porta-potty.

The Catholic and Presbyterian churches in town have offered their facilities on an interim, short-term basis. But that requires some special permitting by the city, so it’s not an immediate answer.

“We are going to host the homeless on Christmas Eve. It’s an issue of humanity,” the Rev. Bob Kelly with Lake Tahoe Community Presbyterian Church said.

The homeless coalition is out of options. Barton Health has said it can’t help.

“Prior to the warm room initially opening, Barton Health was approached about providing space. Unfortunately, we did not have space to meet their requirements,” CEO Clint Purvance told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Lake Tahoe Community College will be asked about space. The college did not respond to an inquiry by *LTN.*

Of the 22 people who spoke at Tuesday’s meeting, the majority were in favor of the warm room at this location.

Bruce Cox, a 1976 graduate of South Tahoe High School, volunteered at the warm room last year. He spoke about how shocked he was to discover a classmate was among the more than 100 people who stayed at the shelter last winter.

Life has a way of turning bleak in the blink of an eye – an illness, job loss, addiction, mental condition – they all can

lead a person to not being able to pay his or her bills.

In a town where housing is in short supply – even the shabby hotels fill up on busy weekends. People can be hard pressed to find four walls and a roof. More than a quarter of the people who slept at the warm room last winter had jobs. They just couldn't afford a place to live.

Cheyanne Lane with Tahoe Youth & Family Services said six of her clients are in need of the warm room.

"These are young people working two and three jobs. They are sleeping in their car. One client is pregnant," Lane told the council.

Kings Beach event center lease terminated

The controversial lease agreement between North Tahoe Public Utility District and Laulima Kings Beach Event Center LLC has been terminated – and not because of public outcry.

"LKBEC did not submit sufficient documentation to the district's third-party financial consultant to satisfy the contingencies in the lease agreement and otherwise verify LKBEC's operational and financial ability to fulfill the terms of the lease agreement," NTPUD said in a press release.

The lease with Laulima was approved Sept. 18 and effective Oct. 5. That approval also began various performance timelines, including a 60-day financial contingency period which ended Dec. 4.

The board voted Dec. 12 to sever ties with Laulima.

This means the operation of the North Tahoe Event Center in Kings Beach will remain in the hands of TCPUD. North Tahoe PUD said it will be "investigating alternatives that reduce or eliminate its on-going operational deficit."

The district has operated the center since 1979.

According to Duane Whitelaw, general manager of TCPUD, this all came about from a "property transfer from the county of Placer who had received the property and building improvements from the state of California following the passage of a voter-approved Parks Bond Act. A condition of the state's acquisition and grant which carried forward in a deed restriction to the county and ultimately to the NTPUD was the property acquired could only be used for 'park purposes'."

The board will be discussing what to do next at its January meeting.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

SLT, EDC taking time to allow pot shops

By Kathryn Reed and Susan Wood

There will be no sales of recreational marijuana anywhere in El Dorado County for the foreseeable future.

This is because on Dec. 12 the South Lake Tahoe City Council and El Dorado County Board of Supervisors at their respective meetings agreed to implement urgency ordinances related to cannabis. Each is a ban for 45 days. (The ban does not affect the current medicinal marijuana operation in the city.)

This is in response to the 2016 California voter approved initiative making recreational pot legal starting Jan. 1. Each jurisdiction has the right to regulate sales and other aspects of the law. What is allowed is growing up to six plants for personal use and smoking at your residence assuming the landlord says it is OK.

It is not legal to drive high – nor will it ever be, private businesses may restrict the use on their premises, it can be illegal in public places, and employers still have a right to say being under the influence is a big no-no.

The city already has a working group of two council members – Tom Davis and Brooke Laine – who are leading a community committee to write a recreational marijuana ordinance with the help of the city attorney.

Three of the six planned meetings have taken place. The time line is for all recommendations to go to the city attorney by the end of January, have it be aired before the Planning Commission in March, with a workshop of the City Council that month, too, and possibly have the ordinance in place by June.

At Tuesday's meeting the Board of Supervisors unanimously voted on the 45-day urgency ordinance to ban commercial licenses for medical and recreational cannabis.

A four-fifths vote for all urgency ordinances – in the city or county – is necessary.

However, it was a 4-1 vote to establish an ad hoc committee of Supervisors Mike Ranalli and Sue Novasel. Supervisor Shiva Frentzen, without saying why, voted no. The committee will study and create ballot measures for various commercial uses tied to taxation.

Novasel reminded the other supervisors that the state's direction seems to be "ever changing." The temporary ban serves as a "wait and see" concession in order to stall

decisions until all aspects of the options surrounding the new law are reviewed.

“Nothing’s off the table,” Novasel told *Lake Tahoe News.*

The county agenda item brought out seven speakers all in favor of supporting the cultivation of the crop, whether for medicinal use or economic benefits.

With climate change, tree die-offs may spread

By Jim Robbins, New York Times

Ponderosa pine and pinyon forests in the American West will die at an increasing rate as the world grows warmer, becoming less and less resilient when they are weakened by higher temperatures, according to new projections.

Although these forests now withstand short droughts, warming temperatures increasingly stress the forests, which means they will no longer survive the shorter droughts they once endured.

And future droughts will be hotter as the planet warms.

Read the whole story

Second La Niña winter could mean drought

By Matt Weiser, Water Deeply

Winter is off to a dry start across the West, raising the specter of ongoing drought in many locations. The culprit could be La Niña – a periodic cooling of Pacific Ocean waters near the equator that often brings drought. And not just any La Niña, but a "double whammy" effect, which latest research concludes may cause even worse water shortages.

La Niña is popularly known as the opposite of El Niño, a warming of equatorial Pacific waters that can result in wet winters. But that is a misconception, according to Yuko Okumura, a research associate at the University of Texas Institute for Geophysics.

In reality, La Niña is unpredictable. As we found out last winter in California, for example, it can also produce wetter than average conditions.

Read the whole story

David sets agenda for year as mayor of SLT



Tom Davis and Wendy David are the leaders of the South Lake Tahoe City Council for the next year. Photo/LTN

Without drama and with unanimous votes, the South Lake Tahoe council changed its leadership roles today.

Wendy David will be mayor for the next year and Tom Davis mayor pro tem.

At the Dec. 12 meeting David laid out her vision for the next year. She would like to see more of a “we” approach and less of a “us v. them” scenario.

“I want to focus on council conversation. Council conversation is what brings us together. That will be the most important thing we can do together,” David said.

Beyond the Tuesday meetings, David wants to initiate a column to be published in local media for the entire council where each member takes a turn to promote something of interest to that individual. She is looking to start a coffee session the day following a council meeting where two electeds would have a chat session with anyone who shows up.

Housing, the recreation center and cannabis are the top three issues the council will be facing, according to David. They are topics she hopes the community will be engaged in;

continuing those conversations she wants people to be having.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Airlines with best, worst on-time flight rankings via Reno

By Jason Hidalgo, Reno Gazette-Journal

Thinking of flying in and out of Reno?

From Burning Man and Hot August Nights, there are plenty of things to do in and around the Biggest Little City. Then you've got your frequent business travelers plus folks who fly out of Reno for vacation or visiting friends and family (if you're interested in finding discounted flights to and from the Biggest Little City, make sure to check out our list of the latest airfare deals and sales through Reno).

For folks who are curious about the on-time performance for the various carriers that serve Reno-Tahoe International Airport, here are the latest on-time rankings from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

Read the whole story

In hospitality industry,

sexual misconduct often part of job

By Don Babwin, AP

CHICAGO — One woman recalls how a general manager at a Chicago-area restaurant where she worked told her that if security cameras recorded him reaching between her legs and grabbing her genitals he could simply "edit that out."

Another woman worked at an Atlanta restaurant and says her boss did nothing when two dishwashers kept making vulgar comments, so she quit wearing makeup to look less attractive and hopefully end the verbal abuse.

In the wake of sexual misconduct allegations against several prominent men in entertainment, politics and journalism, accounts like the ones these women share quietly play out in restaurants, bars and hotels across the country and rarely get the headlines. Court documents and interviews with the women and experts on the topic show hospitality industry workers are routinely subjected to sexual abuse and harassment from bosses, co-workers and customers that are largely unchecked. The nature of the work, which often has employees relying on tips, can make them especially vulnerable to abuse.

Read the whole story

GOP tax bill could curtail

renewable energy surge

By Brad Plumer and Jim Tankersley, New York Times

WASHINGTON — The Republican tax bills moving through Congress could significantly hobble the United States' renewable energy industry because of a series of provisions that scale back incentives for wind and solar power while bolstering older energy sources like oil and gas production.

The possibility highlights the degree to which the nation's recent surge in renewable electricity generation is still sustained by favorable tax treatment, which has lowered the cost of solar and wind production while provoking the ire of fossil-fuel competitors seeking to weaken those tax preferences.

Whether lawmakers choose to protect or jettison various renewable tax breaks in the final bill being negotiated on Capitol Hill could have major ramifications for the U.S. energy landscape, including the prices consumers pay for electricity.

Read the whole story