

Measure S bond changes could generate cash

By Kathryn Reed

Refinancing the South Shore recreation bond will put more money into the pot to be spent on facilities. That was the message delivered to the South Lake Tahoe City Council this week and what the board that oversees Measure S/R will hear this morning.

Financial advisor Mark Northcross with Northcross-Hill-Ach in Marin County told the council Jan. 17, "With both bids you can close without any cash contribution from anybody."

When Northcross first started talking to interested parties late last year it looked like \$400,000 would be needed in order to change the bonds from tax-exempt to taxable. Besides the bond market being better for the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority, the course of action is likely to have 75 percent of the bonds become taxable and 25 percent remain tax-exempt. All will be refinanced to secure a lower interest rate.

The change in tax status is needed per IRS rules regarding for-profit operations. With the city's ice rink now operated by a private company, there is no incentive for it to make a major investment in the property when the contract can be terminated in 50 days.

The contract between Tahoe Sports Entertainment and South Lake Tahoe was altered in early August after City Attorney Patrick Enright became aware of the IRS rule in mid-July.

Northcross has bids locked in from Alliance Bank and Compass Bank. Both, he said, are worth pursuing, with Alliance being slightly better. This is because there would be an annual

estimated savings of \$10,700 a year and the out-clause is more favorable.

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.

Nevada launches online database for election info

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY — Nevada voters can now be better informed with the Wednesday launch of Aurora, a user-friendly, searchable database for all campaign and public officer finance disclosures, Secretary of State Ross Miller said.

Aurora, which can be accessed directly through the Secretary of State's homepage, provides a new level of insight into who is funding campaigns, and how those funds are being spent, he said.

"We named it Aurora because it provides illumination as to how campaigns and our elected representatives are funded," Miller said. "A healthy, vital democracy requires well-informed

voters, and Aurora offers voters the opportunity to get more information more quickly, and consequently make better informed decisions at the polls.

“Aurora is a logical extension to the new campaign filing laws that went into effect Jan. 1 of this year,” he said. “As a result of Assembly Bill 452, passed in the last Legislature, candidates are now required to report their campaign contribution and expense reports, and financial disclosure statements electronically with my office. So it makes sense to have that information as accessible as possible to Nevada voters.”

Aurora includes many features not previously available to Nevada. It will allow users to search and sort all filed Contributions & Expense (C&E) Reports and Financial Disclosure Statements (FDS), and also has the ability to export search results into Excel, CSV and PDF formats for additional sorting and usage.

The Contribution Search and Expenditure Search functions will allow users to search results by the following criteria:

- individual candidates
- political races
- groups
- contributions, including by amount, date range and similar addresses
- contributors
- expenditure recipients.

Aurora will also include future expanded services offered by other divisions of the Secretary of State’s office.

“We’re maximizing the potential of our (Information

Technology) capacity,” Miller said. “In all the divisions in my office, digital services are our best opportunity to serve the most Nevadans effectively and efficiently.”

Additional enhancements planned for later phases of Aurora include:

- more user-friendly filing features
- resident agent searches
- penalties searches
- hotlinks to the corporate details pages for corporate contributors and recipients
- reports comparing original vs. amended reports
- online group registrations (e.g. Political Action Committees)

Aurora is and will continue to be a technological build completed solely by the Secretary of State’s information technology staff at no additional cost to taxpayers.

As the state’s chief elections officer, Miller said he supports fair and transparent campaigns in an effort to restore the public’s faith in the electoral process.

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.

Freestyle skier Burke dies from injuries

By ESPN Action Sports

SALT LAKE CITY – Canadian freestyle skier Sarah Burke died Thursday, nine days after crashing at the bottom of the superpipe during a training run in Utah.

Burke, who lived near Whistler in British Columbia, was 29. She was injured Jan. 11 while training at a personal sponsor event at the Park City Mountain resort.

RoxyCanada's Sarah Burke, a pioneer in women's freeskiing, died Thursday from crash-related injuries.

Tests revealed Burke sustained "irreversible damage to her brain due to lack of oxygen and blood after cardiac arrest," according to a statement released by Burke's publicist.

A four-time Winter X Games champion, Burke crashed on the same halfpipe where snowboarder Kevin Pearce suffered a traumatic brain injury during a training accident on Dec. 31, 2009.

Skier dies at Heavenly after hitting sign

By Kathryn Reed

A 34-year-old man from England died at Heavenly Mountain Resort on Tuesday after running into a sign.

“He was probably skiing faster than he should have and tried to avoid a skier and left the run and the hit marker,” El Dorado County sheriff’s Lt. Les Lovell told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Christopher Michael Perring was pronounced dead at the scene at 3:40pm Jan. 17.

While the incident occurred on the Nevada side of the ski resort near the Tamarack run, the landing zone for the Calstar helicopter is on the California side so it became an El Dorado County Sheriff’s Department case.

A spokesperson for Heavenly was not immediately available.

“Skiing unfortunately is sometimes an inherently dangerous sport,” Lovell said. “Unfortunately, there is not enough snow on the mountain to spread everyone out.”

Although an autopsy is pending, Lovell said blunt force trauma is the likely cause of death.

This is the second outdoor accident involving a resident from the United Kingdom in less than a week. Michael Machell, 23, fell to his death while ice climbing at Cascade Falls. It is

not believed the two men knew each other.

Cal student dies in climbing accident at Cascade Falls

By Steven Bell, Westmorland Gazette

A former mountain rescue volunteer plunged 150 feet to his death Saturday at one of the world's most popular climbing destinations in Lake Tahoe.

Outdoor loving Michael Machell, 23, fell at Cascade Falls after slipping while preparing for an ice-climbing trip with friends.

Greg Almos, El Dorado County deputy sheriff, said: "The way it was described to us, he was at the top preparing to set some anchors and slipped on ice."

A spokesman for El Dorado County Search and Rescue said although there had not been significant snowfall in the region, there had been a lot of ice in rural areas like Cascade Falls.

Machell was an experienced climber who had helped save lives in the Lake District of England, completing 170 rescues with the Langdale and Ambleside Mountain Rescue Team (LAMRT).

He graduated from the University of Cumbria last year with a first class honors degree in outdoor professional practice and was in the U.S. to study for a year at UC Berkeley.

LAMRT team leader and friend Nick Owen said Machell “absolutely lived for the mountains”.

Read the whole story

Artist wins round 1 against S. Tahoe for taking his possessions

By Kathryn Reed

If a picture is worth a thousand words, what are an artist’s tools worth?

South Lake Tahoe officials may soon have to answer that question.

Artist Peter Darvas won his appeal before the South Lake Tahoe City Council this week – meaning he won’t have to pay the \$3,437.50 abatement fine. But now he wants the city to pay for the items officers took from his backyard and subsequently destroyed without his knowing this was going to happen.



Peter Darvas

After the Jan. 17 meeting, Darvas told *Lake Tahoe News* he never saw a list from the city of the items it wanted cleaned up. And he did not receive a certified letter until the abatement was over.

“They looted the entire place,” Darvas said.

Darvas contends the 6-foot cedar fence surrounding his property in the 3100 block of Pioneer Trail is not visible from the street. The city says otherwise.

Because of a complaint, which has not been made public, and the problem originating in 2009, the city decided it was time to take action.

Community Service Officer Bob Albertazzi told the council he sent registered letters and posted a letter at Darvas’ residence to no avail. City code allowed him to hire a contractor to remove the materials from Darvas’ property even though they were behind a fence. Albertazzi told the council some of what was hauled off was up to his discretion. For instance, a cabinet was left, but the materials spilling out were removed.

Darvas contends much of the mess in the yard was for his artwork as well as for the shows he puts on in the South Shore – things like cement for sculpting and canopies for festivals.

He admits things were a mess and some of the items needed to be hauled off. He told *Lake Tahoe News* the appliances the city disposed of were on a trailer ready for the dump.

The council in its 3-1 vote siding with Darvas on Tuesday had concerns that he never received any of the notifications about the abatement proceedings as well as the paperwork was for one parcel number when he owns two adjoining lots. The second lot is where the items were located. Mayor Claire Fortier was the dissenting vote and Councilman Hal Cole recused himself because he lives within 300 feet of Darvas' property.

Darvas has hired an attorney and told *Lake Tahoe News* he intends to pursue a civil complaint against the city for compensation for the goods that were confiscated. He would not put an exact dollar amount on what was taken, but said it is well into six figures.

In situations like this the city cleans up a lot and destroys all goods taken so it's not a matter of being able to give anything back to Darvas.

Scientists to study climate change and the Truckee River

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Scientists are beginning new research into how a warming climate could affect water supplies and flooding along the Truckee River, the waterway that serves as one of the region's central natural features and the source of most of its water.

The \$1.7 million study by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is part of a larger effort examining eight rivers across the West, with California's Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers

among them.

The goal is to get an early idea of what costly changes might be associated with climate change when it comes to the vital issue of water supplies and flooding along major river basins in the western United States, officials said.

“The goal is to look into the future so we can be prepared for it,” said Mary Johannis, deputy planning officer for the Bureau of Reclamation in Sacramento.

Authorized by Congress in 2009 under the Secure Water Act, the study would build on information collected through a risk assessment released last year that examined potential impacts from climate change.

Read the whole story

Windy and white the forecast into Saturday

The first of two storms heading for the Lake Tahoe Basin is expected to strike Thursday afternoon.

The stronger of the two is forecast to arrive late Friday afternoon. Locations above 7,000 are expected to get the brunt of the storms.

The National Weather Service in Reno has issued a winter weather advisory for the basin from 4pm Thursday to 4am Friday – above 7,000 feet.

From Friday through Saturday morning snowfall rates could be in excess of 2 inches per hour. Between 4 and 8 inches could

fall above 7,000 feet Thursday, with 2 inches at lake level.

Wind will be a factor with these storms, which could make driving precarious at times.

A foot or more of snow could fall during the second storm at locations above 7,000 feet.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*