

Pension news in Calif. goes from bad to worse

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

California's big public pension funds are already short tens of billions of dollars. An organization of accountants is about to make the picture look even worse.

A proposed change to pension accounting standards could give more ammunition to conservatives seeking to reduce pension benefits for public sector workers. Gov. Jerry Brown is expected to issue a wide-ranging proposal to overhaul pensions sometime soon.

As Brown and the Legislature prepare to wrestle over pension costs, an organization that sets the industry standards for how government finances are reported, the Governmental Accounting Standards Board, is proposing new rules for calculating pension fund liabilities – the amount of money such funds owe retirees.

The proposal wouldn't have much effect on CalPERS, the nation's largest public pension fund. But it would have an enormous impact on the second largest public fund, CalSTRS.

The California State Teachers' Retirement System already faces a funding gap of \$56 billion – the difference between the money it expects to have on hand over the next 30 years and what it will need to pay out in benefits during the same period.

Read the whole story

Bay Area shooting suspect arrested in El Dorado County

By KCRA-TV

SHINGLE SPRINGS – A shooting suspect wanted out of the Bay Area was caught Thursday morning in Shingle Springs, according to the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department.

The suspect's vehicle was stopped on westbound Highway 50, based on a Be On The Lookout Bulletin.

The right lane of traffic was blocked for a short period of time, but everything was moving smoothly again as of around 7am Thursday.

The suspect is a disgruntled security guard who shot at his supervisor at an apartment complex, according to the Richmond Police Department.

The man was considered armed and dangerous, a Bay City News report states.

[Read the whole story](#)

South Tahoe settles with former transit employee

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe has paid John Andoh, former transit administrator for the now defunct South Tahoe Area Transportation Agency, \$5,000 to settle the claim he filed in

August 2010.

The civil rights lawsuit filed in federal court in Sacramento was against South Lake Tahoe, the city police department and Officer Russell Liles.



John Andoh

Police Chief Brian Uhler, who was not head of the department at the time, was aware of the allegations, but not that a settlement had been reached when contacted by *Lake Tahoe News*.

Assistant City Attorney Nira Feeley said she would provide *Lake Tahoe News* with a copy of the agreement, but has yet to do. So, it's unknown if the city admitted to wrong-doing or cut a check to make the case disappear or some other scenario.

Neither Andoh nor his attorney, Jeff Felton, returned calls.

A series of events, mostly in 2009, led to Andoh seeking legal counsel and the lawsuit being filed.

Southwest canceling Reno-San Jose nonstop flight

By Yun Long, Reno Gazette-Journal

In April, Jerry Garrity's commute will go from one hour to at

least three-and-half hours.

Garrity, 58, makes multiple trips a month between his home in Reno and his real estate brokerage firm near San Jose, Calif., on Southwest Airlines, which handles more than 50 percent of Reno-Tahoe International Airport traffic.

But the airline will permanently discontinue its two daily nonstop flights between the cities in mid-April. Southwest is the only airline to offer nonstop service from Reno to San Jose and vice versa.

“There has always been a nonstop flight from San Jose to Reno,” Garrity said. “And to go for a flight to Los Angeles or Las Vegas and then back to San Jose is turning a 50-minute flight into a four-hour-and-10-minute flight.”

Read the whole story

Variety of questions put STPUD candidates on the spot

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – The six candidates running for the South Tahoe Public Utility District board had to think on their feet a bit more than is usual at election forums.

Instead of each being asked the same question, Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe – sponsors of the event, asked different questions of each candidate. This meant no time to think, no time to essentially repeat what had been said before.



Ann Swallow kept the Wednesday afternoon event at Harrah's Lake Tahoe rolling along as each candidate was asked two unique questions. With time remaining, she asked them all to comment on their thoughts about the Brown Act – the California open meeting law.

While not all were able to precisely define what it does, they agreed transparency and openness in government is important – that backroom decisions are not the way to conduct public business.

Claude Gunsch, Mary Kortge, John Runnels and Randy Vogelgesang are vying for the seat being vacated by Marylou Mosbacher, while Dale Rise and Kelly Sheehan are going after the seat Rise currently has.

Here are the questions and answers in the order they were asked:

- **What vote by the board in the last year do you disagree with and why?**

Gunsch: He could not think of one.

- **Who will you vote for for the seat you are not a candidate for and why?**

Kortge: Kelly. She is great. I know her and she will do a good job. We share a lot of views.

- **Do you believe snowmaking is good or bad for the groundwater supply – and why?**

Runnels: The district entered an agreement to supply Heavenly Valley for this purpose. It increases revenues for the district. I don't see a problem with it. As long as the aquifers are replenishing, I see it as a good thing.

- **What are your thoughts on term limits for the STPUD board?**

Vogelgesang: I have not in the past been a strong proponent for term limits. The longer I have thought about it in relationship to STPUD, I'm in favor of it. The longer you are on the board the tougher it is to be an independent voice on behalf of the community and you side with recommendations from staff too often.

- **Do you agree legal counsel should be present at STPUD board meeting, as is now the case? Why?**

Rise: I've discussed this with staff. I don't believe counsel should be there. Mostly I've noticed counsel has little interaction during the board meetings. I believe we should have a part time in-house counsel instead of outside counsel.

- **If you didn't need a majority of the board, what one change would you make immediately upon being elected?**

Sheehan: I would eliminate (district) seats. I would have the top two vote getters be elected.

- **How do you expect STPUD to look, operate, function four years after your term expires compared to today?**

Gunsch: With my knowledge of the district I can make changes that save ratepayers money with infrastructure.

- **With STPUD's water being very drinkable and plastic in landfills considered horrendous, would you back an initiative that had STPUD working with South Lake Tahoe's Sustainability Commission to ban plastic water bottles from being sold in STPUD's jurisdiction or some other related campaign to reduce the sale of water bottles?**

Kortge: I'm against water bottles – they cause cancer and all sorts of other things. Maybe we should bottle our own and sell it. I think it would be hard to put a ban on it. People buy a ton of bottled water every day.

- **The Desert Research Institute in Reno supports cloud**

seeding. Do you think the water districts in the basin should get together to fund their own cloud seeding so more moisture falls and in turn speeds up replenishing the groundwater? Why?

Runnels: No. It's an unnecessary expense. There is no shortage of water. I think the money could be spent on other projects.

- The district last week announced it would be resuming the turf buy-back program. What are your thoughts about the program?

Vogelgesang: In general I think it's great, but with grant money only. If it were funded with our money, I would not support it.

- Liberty Energy offers free energy audits. Part of those audits includes giving out low flow showerheads. Would you support the district installing low flow toilets for customers who want them? Why?

Rise: Yes – anything to slow consumption. We offer a timer for showers. I believe before I got here we had a program for low flow toilets.

- A few years ago the district had a rebate offer for people who bought energy efficient washing machines. What are your thoughts on these sorts of rebate programs?

Sheehan: I agree with anything that doesn't raise rates, but is an incentive to decrease use. But grant money only – no rate increase.

The election is Nov. 8. Vote by mail ballots have already arrived in mailboxes.

Officials working to eliminate traffic jams by Sand Harbor

By Susan Voyles, Reno Gazette-Journal

On a typical summer day, more than 3,000 people – most of them from Northern Nevada – jam into Sand Harbor State Park on the East Shore of Lake Tahoe.

A long line of vehicles clogs Nevada 28 as motorists wait to pay to enter the park. They park, sometimes illegally, on the side of the road and then walk along the edge of the narrow, two-lane highway.

With the roadway cut between steep slopes, boulders and cliffs, there is simply no place else for people to walk or park. The crowded highway has gotten to the point where park and transportation officials are going to take action by next summer to make the route safer.

“People walk along the highway with coolers, kids and dogs. It’s really no safe place to walk,” said Karen Mullen, a planning consultant for the Tahoe Transportation District and a former Washoe County parks director.

Motorists, including emergency vehicles, can be blocked from heading south on the highway.

“It’s very dangerous,” she said. “Everybody is getting together and working on solutions.”

Read the whole story

Controlled burns in Truckee area start today

The Truckee Ranger District will begin fall prescribed burning today with 15 to 20 acres in the Sawtooth area. Predicted winds are out of the northwest, which should push smoke into the Watson Lake area.

The timing of all burning depend on favorable weather conditions and may continue periodically until significant snow accumulates.

Weather is the most critical factor in determining when a prescribed burn can begin. Temperature, humidity, fuel moisture, and wind conditions are monitored for the right burning conditions. In addition to weather factors, wildlife needs, soil conditions, tree survival, sensitive plants, and fire suppression activities are all considered in the timing of prescribed burns.

A benefit of the prescribed burning will be reduced intensity of future wildland fires in the treated areas. These areas may also provide firefighters with safe locations to control wildfires in the future.

Some of these burns are located in more remote areas of the forest, while some are near communities. Within the Truckee Ranger District of the Tahoe National Forest, pile burning is planned along Alder Creek Road, at Tahoe Timber Trails, and along Highway 89 North. Underburning is planned near Klondike Flats, in the Sagehen Hills, on Sawtooth Ridge, and near Stampede and Boca Reservoirs. Smoke may be visible in these areas.

In addition to prescribed fire, we are working to reduce fuels by thinning dense stands of trees and cutting back or removing brush and smaller trees using mechanical thinning, mastication, and hand removal of vegetation throughout the forest. All of these techniques are important in reducing the amount of forest fuels.

S. Tahoe cops arrest man ordered to stop soliciting money for hurricane victims

By Larry Altman, Daily Breeze

A Rolling Hills Estates man ordered recently to stop soliciting donations online for Hurricane Irene victims has been arrested in South Lake Tahoe, police said.

Benjamin Ellis Freedland, 28, was taken into custody Saturday stemming from a case in which he tried to run a man over with his car in Redondo Beach in 2010, police said.

Freedland, a Palos Verdes Peninsula High School graduate, remained in custody Tuesday on \$50,000 bail in the El Dorado County jail.

A warrant was issued for Freedland's arrest in September when he failed to appear in court for a hearing related to an assault with a deadly weapon conviction.

The charge stemmed from a road rage encounter in April 2010 in which Freedland tried to run a man over, Redondo Beach police Sgt. Shawn Freeman said.

That occurred shortly after Freedland prevented the victim from merging into traffic to pass a construction zone. When Freedland pulled up next to him and blocked him, the victim asked, "What's your problem?"

Freedland threw a bag of sunflower seeds at the victim and followed him home to the 700 block of Knob Hill Avenue, police said.

Freedland then drove at the victim, a mixed martial arts enthusiast who hit Freedland's car with his nunchakus, a hand weapon used for defense.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe cuts staff, gears up to make town more liveable

By Kathryn Reed

In a matter of seconds the South Lake Tahoe City Council voted to do away with a list of positions. This, after hearing about 2½ hours of testimony – from staff and a dozen others – on the 2011-12 budget.

"It seems so anticlimactic. With these votes we've affected so many people's lives," Mayor Hal Cole said as he adjourned the meeting.

As the room cleared out, sitting in the very back was Marty Scheuerman. Dressed in his uniform as a division chief with the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, his body language did not exhibit that of the usually confident firefighter. Instead, he shook his head – not believing this day had

finally come.



South Lake
Tahoe Mayor
Hal Cole on
Oct. 18
delivers the
state of the
city address.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

His was one of the 19 positions eliminated on Tuesday. In one month, he along with the 18 others (including all three division chiefs) will be without jobs. It's possible some of them will be hired for one of the six jobs being created by the city.

He is not ready to retire. He wants to keep working. He is not alone.

Ray Zachau is a division chief and the fire marshal. One of the new positions being created is fire marshal. If he applies and were to be picked for the job, he would get the pay of a captain.

But it's a job.

Even though the city made a convincing case for downsizing, what with 65 percent of the budget going toward personnel expenses and revenues declining – it still means the 16.5 percent unemployment rate in South Lake Tahoe is about to jut

up.

While the room was filled Oct. 18 with current and former employees, their pleas to the council members to rethink their impending decisions were unsuccessful. The council on 5-0 votes ultimately chose to go forward with approving the \$94.7 million budget (of which \$28.6 million is the general fund budget) and subsequent cuts in staff.

Pulled from the agenda were items D and E under New Business – which both had to do with the General and Public Works contracts.

Steve Crouch, who represents this sector (which at about 60 employees is the largest employee group), was conspicuously absent from the budget hearing. His limited time as negotiator is not being well received by all employees.

Negotiations with other labor groups are ongoing. The firefighter association contract was approved Tuesday. If and when other groups settle, appropriate addendums will be made to the 2011-12 budget (fiscal year started Oct. 1) to reflect any changes.

The city speaks

Another noticeable bit of silence was Councilman Bruce Grego. He said nothing about the budget, the people being let go, or the future of the city.

Councilman Tom Davis said how hard this has been and how frustrated he is, adding that as much as employees fight for their jobs, no one has come forward with another way to eliminate the \$5.2 million deficit.

Councilwoman Claire Fortier said is it time to invest in the city so it is a viable place for residents, employees and tourists.

Cole said reliance on reserves, while they are being used this

fiscal year and likely will be next year as well, must end and the public sector must wake up to the realities the private sector has been living with for years – the need to live within their means.

Councilwoman Angela Swanson made the most impassioned speech, echoing on speaker Mary Ann Klein's plea to not lose the sense of community when talking numbers and positions. But ultimately, Swanson said, "I was elected to serve 20,000 people, not just the 200 who work here."

The day started with Cole giving the state of the city address.

In many ways it was much like a recap of a year's worth of council decisions. Where the city has been, the decisions made to keep it afloat, and the vision for the future were neatly outlined in his 30-minute speech.

He was adamant in saying the vision is that of the council's, to which they direct City Manager Tony O'Rourke and the rest of the staff to carry out their policy decisions.

"We have to rebuild this community. That is our long-term future. We need to maintain the residential base and attract tourists," O'Rourke said. He is the first city manager to embrace and openly acknowledge South Lake Tahoe is a tourist-based economy and as such must work too attract tourists while maintaining a town people want to live in.

What others said

Noteworthy were the faces in the crowd not usually at a council meeting – representatives from Heavenly Mountain Resort, South Tahoe Public Utility District, El Dorado County Sheriff's Department, South Lake Tahoe police and fire, Barton Health, and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Pete Sonntag, general manager at Heavenly, explained the

resort's \$25 million investment in the gondola was contingent upon lift ticket sales not being taxed. He said if the city were to renege on that deal, it would likely make future developers question whether the city will stick by its contracts.

He pointed to the 1,500 employees the resort has in the winter with an annual payroll of \$16 million as evidence the company is part of this community.

"Our company may be based in Colorado, but we're locals," Sonntag said of the employees.

Recreation was a common theme Tuesday.

Teri Jamin, who worked for the city from 1984-2009, talked snowplow drivers and parks and rec. She believes the personal touch at the rec center will be compromised with the elimination of staff.

"The litmus test is in the end result; is it in the best interest of the city of South Lake Tahoe?" Jamin said.

Setting the record straight

- People still don't understand the city can't do anything about the hole – aka would be convention center. It's in bankruptcy.
- It was noted the current operators of the ice rink are paying utilities, are responsible for maintenance and operations costs, and must set aside money for future capital improvements.
- In the past, 16 full-time employees and three or four seasonal workers were used for snowplowing. This winter, 10 full-time workers will do the job with the assistance of 11 seasonal workers.
- Bijou Golf Course will not be operated by a private entity

because the return on invest is not there.

- Talks are under way to have El Dorado County operate the senior center and Lake Tahoe Boys & Girls Club to have a greater role in youth recreation.

“The service will be seamless,” O’Rourke said. And services will not be diminished.

- The City Council’s budget was slated to go up 4 percent or \$7,800 to pay for any classes or travel the five may want to partake in. However, they voted that out of the budget.

- It will be in early 2012 the council will be asked to formally approve going forward with the certificate of participation to pay for infrastructure. There would be \$4 million for roads, with \$1 million divvied up between Harrison Avenue and Linear Park. Linear Park is slated to get about a quarter of that \$1 million, with another \$20,000 in city coffers for Linear Park donated from Core 24 Charities.

- Even if the Tahoe Valley Community Plan were adopted, it could not be implemented until the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency adopts its Regional Plan.

Names of Tahoe City fire victims released

By Reno Gazette-Journal

A structure fire in the early morning hours on Tuesday resulted in the deaths of two Tahoe City residents and their dog.

Peter Maktenieks, 50, and Amy Pass, 39, both died in what appears to be an accidental fire, said Capt. Jeffrey Ausnow, North Tahoe station commander for the Placer County Sheriff's Office.



Two people and
a dog died
Oct. 18 in a
Tahoe City
house fire.
Photo/Placer
County
Sheriff's
Office

Firefighters were called to the residence at 1776 Spruce Drive in Tahoe City near Sunnyside about 1:30am, and found the front of the home fully engulfed in flames stretching 50 to 100 feet in the air, said Dave Zaski, spokesman for North Tahoe Fire.

"The first-in fire engine had heavy fire in the front porch area in the front side of the home," Zaski said.

Read the whole story