

S. Tahoe council still unable to agree on sign regulation

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe Councilman Tom Davis said, “I don’t want to be the taste police” when it comes to what kind of decorative lights people use on their businesses.



The Swiss Chalet sign could be grandfathered in.

The irony is the overall discussion was about signs – which is subjective and a matter of taste.

With more discussion Tuesday about the decades-old sign problem in the city, the council still is working through what rules it wants to dictate private businesses follow – all in the name of taste.

This type of regulation is something most cities have. The local problem is what is on the books is not enforced because this and previous councils have not agreed with it nor has there been the manpower to enforce the rules.

Too many changes were proposed Sept. 13 for a vote to be taken on the first reading of the ordinance. The soonest the next

revision will come back to the council is Oct. 4.

The five councilmembers took votes on individual sections of the ordinance, but most of those were split – meaning the issue is as divisive as it ever has been.

How any ordinance that might get approved will be enforced was the subject of much discussion.

Owners of non-conforming signs will be sent a letter giving them 10 days to bring it up to code. If they don't, then they'll be fined each day they are out of compliance.

The five could not agree whether the Planning Commission should be the last stop for some appeals or if the council should be the body making that decision.

Nor could they all decide on when sandwich boards should be used. Though the majority sided with Development Services Director Hilary Hodges' proposal to allow them only during holiday periods and city sanctioned community events.

What's being called "locally unique signs" will be allowed to stay if the owners apply for that designation. Sno-Flake, Swiss Chalet and Stardust were the examples used.

No longer will private businesses be able to hire someone to hold a sign pointing to their business. But people having car washes and the like will be able to lure people to their fund-raising event in this manner.

Businesses wanting to string up energy efficient blue or white lights year-round can do so. No permit needed to do so for 90 days between Nov. 1 and March 1, though a design review is needed and a building permit may be required to keep them up longer. This is primarily to look at fire safety issues.

While progress was made on the sign issue, until a final vote is taken, each council member can change their mind. After all, that is what happened with the medical marijuana vote.

In other action:

- The council approved the ordinance affecting how medical marijuana dispensaries are regulated. Councilman Bruce Grego was the lone vote against the law. At the first reading Councilwoman Angela Swanson had voted no. Tuesday she voted yes.

No contest for Amodei; NV seat in the House still GOP

By Kyle Trygstad, Roll Call

Republican Mark Amodei ran away with a victory Tuesday night in the special election for Nevada's 2nd district.

Amodei, a former state legislator and ex-state GOP chairman, took 57 percent of the vote to Democratic state Treasurer Kate Marshall's 37 percent with 66 percent of precincts reporting.



Mark Amodei

Amodei keeps the seat in GOP hands following the Senate appointment of Republican Dean Heller in May. The rural district, which includes all of Nevada outside metro Las Vegas, has never elected a Democrat to the House since it was created in 1981.

That fact, along with President Barack Obama's 33 percent approval rating and the Marshall campaign's inability to find a message that moved voters in her direction, led to this race becoming even less competitive than the other Tuesday special election in New York's heavily Democratic 9th district.

Nevada added a fourth district through reapportionment, so this district will change when Amodei seeks a full term in November 2012. It's the most likely of the four districts to be a safe Republican seat, but nothing is certain with the state's redistricting process now in the courts.

Read the whole story

El Dorado supes expand Tahoe district beyond the basin

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Without public or board comment, El Dorado County Supervisors gave their final approval to a redistricting plan for board seats today.

The plan's basic outlines were approved in July and got their first detailed approval in August, despite opposition from organized groups advocating better representation for El Dorado Hills and Cameron Park, the county's fastest-growing communities.



Norma Santiago

Supervisors approved the plan – which is likely to be in effect until 2021 – on a 4-1 vote, with Supervisor Norma Santiago dissenting.

Santiago had pushed to keep her district close to what it had been – just the Tahoe Basin portion of the county – but that district will now extend all the way to Pollock Pines.

Read the whole story

Nevada to make campaign contribution info accessible online

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Members of the public interested in the esoteric world of political campaign contribution and expense reports should be salivating with the knowledge that as of Jan. 1, this information will finally be available in a usable format.

Secretary of State Ross Miller said as a result of campaign finance reporting reforms he sought and the Legislature approved this past session, the contributions candidates receive and the expenditures they make on their campaigns will

soon be much more transparent.

His office staff is working now on creating a searchable database that will allow interested persons to examine the newly revised reports filed by elected officials and candidates in a number of different ways. The new reporting requirements take effect Jan. 1, and Miller said his office intends to have the database ready on that date. The first use of the new search function will come as elected officials from across the state electronically file their annual reports for calendar year 2011 on Jan. 15, 2012.

As the reports are filed the information will instantly become available on the Secretary of State's website. No longer will officials be able to mail in reports, requiring manual loading of the information by Miller's staff. No longer will handwritten and sometimes illegible reports be accepted, with an exception for those who claim no access to the necessary technology.

At 12:01am on Jan. 16, all of the information from the Jan. 15 reports will be accessible. Sooner for those reports filed early.

"Mandating that these reports be filed electronically is the first step in putting the information in a way that is accessible to the public," Miller said. "And I think when this system is unveiled it will bring Nevada out of the Dark Ages of campaign finance reporting and finally shine a light on the campaign finance data to make it accessible in a format for the public."

State Sen. David Parks, D-Las Vegas, chairman of the Legislative Operations and Elections Committee that reviewed and supported the changes, said lawmakers made a lot of progress on the campaign reporting issue last session. But as one who must comply with the new requirements, Parks said he is looking forward to seeing the new reporting forms.

The easier it is for elected officials to complete the reports, the better the compliance will be, he said.

“I think we have an obligation to file reports that are well documented and as accurate as possible,” Parks said.

Miller said people will be able to search for contributions by a contributor’s name or address, by specific amounts or by a date range. On the expenditure side, people will be able to search by the name of the person or business paid, by the amount, by certain dates or by expenditure types.

Other search options will also be available, and the data will be exportable into a PDF or CSV format.

Miller said his office will not be able to add information from reports filed by mail by elected officials and candidates in previous election cycles. But if a candidate or elected official previously filed a report electronically, that information will be available as well, he said.

Report rips how SLTFD functions, says keep station 2

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe is not closing a fire station, even though the prospect of doing so has been discussed for several months. However, other changes besides personnel are in the works.



"The biggest risk is inadequate code education and enforcement. We need to be more diligent," City Manager Tony O'Rourke said of his assessment of a study done on the city's fire department.

ERASE Enterprises out of Texas has given the city a 27-page report based on its analysis of the operations of the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department. The report paints a picture of inefficiency, poor recordkeeping, shoddy supervision, a lack of emphasis on fire prevention, reserves being underutilized, and a need to review contracts for mutual aid, including the ambulance service.

The report has been disseminated to fire staff, with their comments on it expected to Chief Brian Uhler by the end of the week.

By Sept. 19, Uhler expects to have an action plan to deliver to O'Rourke.

"We know we are keeping station 2 up and running," Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*.

O'Rourke originally contracted with the firm to assess the operation of the station near South Tahoe Middle School. Part of the reason had to do with the number of calls the station responds to and part is the age of the building. The cost of the study was about \$12,000, which came out of the fire department's budget.

It was two years ago that then Fire Chief Lorenzo Gigliotti was looking at relocating station 2, as compared to the latest talk of doing away with the station. Right now the status quo will remain in regards to station facilities. However, the report says the city should, "Evaluate the ability to modify Fire Station #1 to accept Truck 2 or the construction of a new station at Al Tahoe Boulevard and Pioneer Trail with the sale

of the property at Fire Stations #2 & #3.”

Expect to see current Chief Uhler at more fires. That is another recommendation of the report – a chief of this size department that had just seven structure fires in 2010 should have the top guy at them. This was not the case.

“In fact, per the Unit Logs maintained by the dispatch center the Fire Chief only responded to 3 of the 42 actual fire related incidents in the City. In each case he did not respond with the initial response of emergency personnel,” the report says. “His responses for the three incidents were 33 minutes, 50 minutes, and 1 hour and 26 minutes after the initial alarm. In a department of this size, the Fire Chief must be part of the initial response to all structure fires and specialized hazard incidents.”

Dealing with people

“We have addressed some of issues like structural changes,” O’Rourke said in regards hierarchy in the department.

For the time being Uhler has added fire chief to his police chief duties. That is expected to last about a year.

Though it won’t be a done deal until the council approves the budget this month (it could happen Thursday night), the working document does not have the three division chiefs on the payroll.

O’Rourke has previously said some of the nine captains will be given more responsibility.

However, some of these men are the ones who insiders said helped get themselves a 2 percent raise starting Oct. 1 by being the only employee group to reach a deal with the city, while at the same selling out their bosses – the division chiefs.

“It came down to a simple issue – close the station or reduce

the administration,” Uhler said.

Uhler said the city’s priority should be keeping the stations open with actual firefighters and paramedics on staff to reach the emergency.

If the division chiefs are let go, this means the fire marshal position is vacant. Policy had it that Lake Valley and South Tahoe’s fire marshals filled in for each other. Lake Valley has a newbie at that position with the promotion of Gareth Harris to fire chief.

Uhler would not speak to how the fire marshal role will be handled in the future until a decision regarding the division chiefs has been made.

He did say, “We will promote some people into shift commander jobs.”

City looks like a firetrap

“Of serious concern was that the area visually observed as the most dangerous part of the community regarding unsafe fire conditions was exactly where most of the structure fires occurred per the data analysis! When you can drive around and via a ‘windshield inspection’ predict where the structure fires will be you have an obvious lack of code enforcement,” the report states.

It is the fire marshal and building inspector who are responsible for those types of code enforcement.

The report suggests creating an anti-arson program, and to look at state and federal funds to deal with blighted areas.

“During the initial data review, the site visit, and subsequent review of department records many other issues came to light which all impact the efficiency and effectiveness of the fire protection system for the city,” the report says.

This is why the scope of the analysis grew beyond looking at if the city could do without station 2.

In all, 25 recommendations were brought forward. Uhler said some will be implemented, others won't. Until he gets feedback from the fire staff, he would not elaborate beyond what he had already said.

However, more complete reports are bound to be on the to-do list.

"To be able to rely on data to make critical management decisions the reports that the data is extracted from must be both valid and reliable. To achieve these two measures the reports must be completely filled out with valid data and the reporting methodology must be consistent and accurate, thereby being reliable. In our review we found reports that listed content damage but no property value, property loss with no property value listed, content loss without content value and so forth," the consults says in the report. "Other reports had no physical address shown (even for a wildfire a geographical address needs to be entered to complete the report) and on others we found numerous fires occurring at the same location but with different identifiers used to describe the same location. The lack of complete and accurate reports is an issue that comes from both training and a lack of supervision."

The report also wants the city's money people to be more engaged.

Two recommendations are, "Re-evaluate all contracts for outside services with the City Finance Department reviewing actual costs for services versus fee structures in the contracts to ensure a positive cash flow outcome.

"[And] (e)valuate permit fees and stand by fees for the fire department to ensure that fee structure represents costs for the services."

Douglas County motorcyclist dies on Spooner Summit

A Minden man died driving up Spooner Summit toward Lake Tahoe when he failed to negotiate a left curve.

Edwin Bruno-Mazariego, 25, died at the scene Saturday afternoon.

“Excessive speed and motorcycle rider inexperience are being looked into as possible contributing factors to this tragic crash,” Nevada Highway Patrol Trooper Chuck Allen said in a statement.



A motorcyclist died Saturday on Spooner Summit.

Photo/Provided

The speed limit is 50 mph. Bruno-Mazariego was wearing protective gear, including a helmet.

Officers said the victim was ejected from his 2008 Kawasaki ZX600P after the motorcycle struck a guard rail.

Witnesses to the Sept. 10 2:19pm accident are asked to contact Trooper Mike Stapledon at (775) 689.4623.

Lightning ignites fire near Meyers station

A small fire sparked by a lightning strike started behind the Lake Valley Fire Station off Highway 89 in Meyers Monday.

The 20 square-foot fire is located on the east side of the major thoroughfare between Meyers and Luther Pass southwest of an area known as Cowboy Rock, Lake Valley fire officials reported.

The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit sent a Forest Service crew to fight the fire, which started approximately 5pm.

Lightning has become the culprit of other fires in the Tahoe National Forest, including the Mears, French, Disney, Boca Springs and Groundhog and the Reservoir Fire on the north side of Stampede Reservoir. The Middle Fire located about nine miles northeast of Foresthill in the Peavine area was contained Monday afternoon.

–Lake Tahoe News staff report

Study: Hottest summer on

record for most of the country

By Julie Cart, Los Angeles Times

The National Climatic Data Center announced Thursday what most Americans had been feeling all summer: It's been a scorcher across the country, the second-hottest since 1895.

But not by much. The warmest national average for June, July and August was 74.6 in 1936. This summer's average was 74.5.



Youth enjoy a summer evening at the pier near Nevada Beach.

Photo/LTN

The temperature average has to be considered in context. Some regions experienced unseasonably cool weather, and California and New Jersey had their wettest summers ever.

Read the whole story

Traffic on Hwy. 50 in S. Tahoe about to move even slower

Caltrans says to expect up to 10-minute delays on Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe between Fremont Avenue and Trout Creek Bridge beginning Sept. 14. Crews will begin grinding and paving operations as part of a stormwater and water quality improvement project.

The lane closures are from 7am-7pm Monday–Friday. Work is scheduled for completion in early to mid-October. Traffic controls will be in effect 24 hours a day.



Crews pour
concrete at
Highway 50
near Rufus
Allen
Boulevard on
Sept. 12.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

Buses and school traffic for South Tahoe Middle School and Saint Theresa School will be accommodated, with minimal delays. Some city bus stops will be inaccessible. Affected city bus stops will have signs directing riders to the next available stop. For additional information related to city bus

stops, contact Martin Jimenez at (530) 542.5700, ext. 111.

This work is part of a two-mile, \$40.6 million road improvement project on Highway 50 from Trout Creek Bridge to Ski Run Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe. It includes sand traps, stormwater detention vaults and filtration ponds to collect and treat runoff before it reaches Lake Tahoe. In addition, the project will help reduce vehicle emissions by adding Class II bike lanes, Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant sidewalks, and pedestrian lighting. Other features include new intersection signals, landscaping and streetscaping.

Stateline casinos rake in the cash in July

July is often a good month for the Stateline casinos because of the American Century Celebrity Golf Tournament.

This year was no different – just better. The South Shore casinos won \$30 million; a 25 percent increase from July 2010.



July has also become the busiest summer month on the South Shore, and throughout Lake Tahoe, because more schools start in August. It also helped that the weather was near perfect, which is a huge draw for people living within driving distance of the basin.

All of Nevada did well in July, with the state winning \$860 million for a 3.7 percent gain compared to 2010. All of the data was released today from the Nevada Gaming Control Board.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report