

S. Tahoe challenging League's suit regarding General Plan

By Kathryn Reed

Frivolous is basically what South Lake Tahoe is calling the lawsuit filed by the League to Save Lake Tahoe against the city's General Plan.



In closed session this morning, the City Council agreed to have City Attorney Patrick Enright file a motion to dismiss. That paperwork must be completed by the end of business July 12.

"We argue they don't have standing to file in federal court," Enright told *Lake Tahoe News* on Tuesday during a break in the council meeting.

The League filed the suit in U.S. District Court in Sacramento citing the General Plan violates the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Compact and Regional Plan.

The city counters that the League cannot claim to be an aggrieved party under the Compact.

In addition to that, the city says because there is no project – the document in question is a planning tool – there is no basis for the suit.

"There is no damage to anyone, including the League," Enright said.

Once the city files its motion, the League has time to file an opposition motion, with the city given a week then to file a response to that motion.

A hearing has been set for Sept. 12 before Judge Garland Burrell in federal court.

Professor using technology to get hospitality down to a science

By Liz Benston, Las Vegas Sun

Students at MIT and Stanford use high-tech devices to study nerve impulses in the human brain and subatomic particles in the solar system. Now UNLV students will take a similarly scientific approach to something crucial to this tourism-dependent town: hotel room rates.

Starting in August, a graduate-level class in hotel revenue management at the William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration will get a crack at software that's expected to revamp some of the management decisions that define the casino niche.

The software simulates hotel management by using mathematical formulas to forecast demand based on bookings from different types of customers and the scheduling of concerts and conventions to attract business. Students will use the software to set rates for hotel rooms based on what customers spend throughout the simulated hotels.

Rather than raising room rates when demand rises, students could give customers free rooms if they expect to make at least \$100 off each customer during their hotel stay.

Hotel pricing is largely guesswork despite the widespread use

of simpler forecasting systems in the industry, said Mehmet Erdem, a UNLV associate professor who will incorporate the software into his class. Many hotel managers are focused on maximizing room revenue, but charging customers lower rates may be more profitable long term, he said.

“You can’t just look at the revenue generated by a room,” he said. “You have to look at the revenue generated by each customer and be willing to adjust prices for those who go to the spa and dine in restaurants.”

Read the whole story

Plane leaks fuel after landing hard in Placerville

By Matt Kawahara, Sacramento Bee

A small airplane attempting to take off from the Placerville Airport on Monday made a hard landing near the runway, causing the pilot to be hospitalized and fuel to leak from the damaged aircraft, officials said.

The plane lifted off briefly before hitting the ground off the side of the runway around 4 p.m., said El Dorado County sheriff’s spokesman Lt. Bryan Golmitz. Officials said the cause is unknown.

Fire crews responded and found the pilot had climbed out of the downed plane, said El Dorado County Fire District Battalion Chief Tim Cordero. The pilot, the only occupant of the plane, was evaluated by paramedics and transported to a local hospital, Cordero said.

Parole: Garrido upbeat 9 days after kidnapping Dugard

By Sam Stanton and Denny Walsh, Sacramento Bee

Nine days after they kidnapped Jaycee Lee Dugard, Phillip and Nancy Garrido paid a visit to his parole officer, who indicated things seemed to be going quite well for the convicted rapist and kidnapper.

"No major changes," the federal parole agent wrote on June 19, 1991, adding later, "A lot of complex issue (sic) with this case.

"He talked about the way he met Nancy and their life together. He seems committed to their relationship."

The upbeat assessment is part of Garrido's voluminous federal parole file, made public for the first time Monday through a Freedom of Information Act request that the *Bee* filed in September 2009.

The file, released as Dugard's memoir goes on sale today, gives the most complete assessment to date of the numerous visits to Garrido's home by federal parole agents who never noticed the 11-year-old kidnap victim being held captive in the backyard.

While partially redacted, the file underscores the agents' lax supervision of Garrido, and demonstrates how easy it was for him to con some officials and co-workers into believing he had reformed himself.

Principal changes at St. Theresa School

By Kathryn Reed

Anne Filce is in the principal's office and Danette Winslow is back in the classroom full time.



The change at St. Theresa School in South Lake Tahoe became effective July 1, though the decision was made during the last school year. It's the head pastor who makes the administrative decision.

Filce has been a teacher at the Catholic K-8 school on and off since 1996. In addition to her job as principal, she will also be teaching the 4-5 combination class like she did last year.

Winslow was in the classroom some of her years while principal. She was not available for comment.

Filce said she would be attending Catholic school management training courses later this month. Her focus will be on learning about recruitment and retention of students.

In 2005, the school had more than 200 students, while in 2010-11 there were less than 90.

Filce pointed to the economy – South Lake Tahoe had an unemployment rate of 17 percent in May – and families moving as reasons enrollment has declined.

Her school is not alone. Lake Tahoe Unified and Douglas County school districts are facing the same dilemma on the South Shore.

However, Filce does have making calls to parents who no longer have kids at St. Theresa on her to-do list this summer before classes begin Sept. 6.

St. Theresa is the only Catholic school in the basin, with the next nearest one being in El Dorado Hills. Filce said even though rumors have floated the school is closing; she said there is no truth to that.

Besides enrollment concerns, Filce will also be spearheading the accreditation process that begins in the fall.

Her contract is for one year, which Filce said is normal for Catholic schools – to renew them annually.

Test scores up, while education funding dips in California

By Diana Lambert and Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

It's a trend that would seem to defy conventional wisdom: As public school spending has declined in California in recent years, student achievement test scores have gone up.

Statewide, school districts spent 6 percent less from 2008 to 2010, but the percentage of second- to seventh-grade students scoring proficient on the state's standardized English test rose from 48 percent to 55 percent.

In the Sacramento region, the same held true. School districts in the four-county region cut annual spending by about \$120 million, or 4.4 percent, from 2008 to 2010, hampered by the lousy economy and state funding cuts. That translates to a 1 percent cut per student. But during that same period, their state achievement test scores improved – a lot.

The percentage of area second- through seventh-graders, for instance, scoring proficient or advanced in English jumped from 53 percent to 59 percent, while the portion scoring proficient or above in math went from 57 percent to 62 percent.

So, are educators finding ways to do more with less? Has student learning been largely unaffected by the spending cuts? The reviews are mixed.

Read the whole story

Contractors blast Nevada officials for not funding roads

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – A contractors representative told the state Transportation Board today that officials missed out on opportunities to increase road funding in the 2011 legislative session, and that failing to act promptly on the issue could cost Northern Nevada a competitive bid for the 2022 Winter Olympics.

John Madole, executive director of the Nevada Chapter of the

Associated General Contractors, said that while a number of bills introduced last session, “would have addressed highway funding and other infrastructure investment that would have begun restoring our state’s economic health, none were processed out of an apparent fear of ‘political incorrectness’ and concern of endangering the political careers of elected officials that must stand for re-election.”

Madole, who noted Nevada’s gas tax has not been increased since the early 1990s, asked the board to “take the lead in immediately planning for the future needs of our state, helping restore the economic growth that will return Nevadans to work.”

The Nevada Legislature would have to act to increase the state gas tax rate.

Rather than find a way to increase investment in transportation, the 2011 session took a step backward, diverting \$52 million in highway funds over the coming two years to the operation of the Department of Motor Vehicles and “putting another 1,500 Nevadans, who would have been employed on highway projects out of work,” he said.

Nevada has the highest unemployment in the construction industry among the 50 states, with more than 90,000 construction workers losing their jobs since 2006, he said. The seven-member Transportation Board includes Gov. Brian Sandoval, Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki, Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto and state Controller Kim Wallin. There are three public members as well.

Madole said Assembly Bill 152 from the 2011 session proposed to establish a group of citizens to address the state’s long term transportation needs in Nevada and place an advisory issue before the voters in November 2012.

Sandoval vetoed the bill.

In an interview after delivering his statement, Madole said time is of the essence if the state is going to bid on the Winter Olympics.

“If we’re going to do something about these Olympics, or anything else, we need to get moving,” Madole said. “The presentation I heard said they might quadruple the air traffic out of Vegas where people are staying in Vegas, flying up here for the Olympics. They are going to get on Interstate 580 and head straight to the Spaghetti Bowl and probably wait 30 minutes to get through it.”

Sandoval, who has directed the state Department of Transportation to look at the infrastructure implications of an Olympic bid, said Nevada is doing all it can to ensure it gets every road dollar available.

Krolick is chair of the committee to bring the Games to Tahoe-Reno.

DA, state senator team up to change parole system

State Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, and El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson today launched a joint effort to strengthen California’s public safety protection in light of the circumstances surrounding Jaycee Lee Dugard’s kidnapping and captivity.

Gaines and Pierson have scheduled a public meeting Aug. 3 at the Capitol with law enforcement leaders and victims’ rights organizations to explore deficiencies in state law and identify potential legislative solutions to prevent these

kinds of tragedies from occurring again.

“Jaycee’s kidnapping and her 18 years spent in captivity were beyond reprehensible,” Gaines said in a statement. “That’s why I’m working with the El Dorado County District Attorney to examine what went wrong in the Dugard case, identify reforms to the system and introduce legislation to better protect our citizens from becoming the next victim.”

The public hearing will include an analysis of the many shortcomings in federal and state parole supervision, as well as the initial investigation. The hearing will in part be informed by California Inspector General David R. Shaw’s 2009 report on the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s supervision of registered sex-offender and lifetime parolee Phillip Garrido. The report uncovered a number of mistakes that let Dugard’s rapist and kidnapper remain free and keep her in captivity.

Parole visited Garrido’s home 60 times – failing to ever notice Dugard of the tent-shack compound out back where she lived with her two daughters fathered by Garrido.

The report noted that the CDCR also failed to train parole agents to conduct home visits.

“If the system had worked the way it should have, Ms. Dugard and her two daughters would have been discovered merely 30-feet away,” Gaines said. “It’s hard to fathom that the backyard encampment where they were held captive went completely unnoticed for nearly two decades.”

On July 8, 2011, the United States District Court for the Northern District of California released a previously confidential report which characterizes Garrido’s federal parole supervision as “clearly substandard.”

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Casino revenues rise on both shores of Lake Tahoe

By Bill O'Driscoll, Reno Gazette-Journal

Washoe County gaming revenues fell for a seventh straight month in May, the state reported Monday, as the region continues to struggle with recession and competition for gamblers' dollars.

"Some day we'll get to the bottom of this, and it will stabilize at some point and we'll see minor growth," said Ken Adams, a Reno gaming analyst. "The question is, when will that be?"

Washoe's gaming revenues have fallen since last November, most recently a 6.6 percent drop in May compared with May 2010, according to the Nevada Gaming Control Board report.

Casinos in Reno carried the brunt of the downturn with revenues declining 7.7 percent. The report showed revenue rose slightly in Sparks by 2.1 percent and among north Lake Tahoe casinos by 2.8 percent, but those increases compared against double-digit declines in May 2010.

"It's the economy and it's competition," Adams said, citing tribal casinos in California's Sierra foothills that continue to siphon off motorists from Bay Area markets that are key to the Reno-Sparks gaming community.

Read the whole story

1 arrest in vehicle, bike collision in Truckee

On July 10 at approximately 5:30pm a bicyclist collided with a vehicle at the intersection of Donner Pass Road at Northwoods Drive in Truckee.

The driver of the vehicle initially got out of the vehicle, but then fled eastbound on Donner Pass. While enroute to the accident, the Truckee Fire ambulance crew saw the suspect vehicle at a high rate of speed as it passed the fire station and was able to provide a description.

The bicyclist, a 31 year old man from Truckee, was transported to Tahoe Forest Hospital for treatment of facial and head injuries.

Investigation showed that the bicyclist failed to stop for the red signal light and ran into the vehicle.

Nearly an hour after the accident officers located the possible vehicle involved inside the Donner Creek Mobile Home Park. The ambulance crew identified the vehicle and driver.

Miguel Martinez-Lopez, 43 of Truckee, was arrested on charges of being an unlicensed driver, no proof of insurance and felony hit and run. His bail was set at \$10,000.