Illegal lakefront wall met with $120,000 fine

A Zephyr Cove resident has one extremely expensive rock wall – that must be torn down.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board levied a $120,000 fine Jan. 26 against Edgar Roberts for 11 violations.

In addition to the fine, Roberts must remove the fill from his and the neighboring properties, rebuild the retaining wall correctly, and restore any disturbed areas. Of course he must do all of this with the proper permits from TRPA and other necessary agencies.

Roberts, years ago, approached the bi-state regulatory agency about rebuilding and moving the retaining wall into an area the agency deemed sensitive and near the lake's high water mark.

Three years ago, Roberts brought in more than 200 tons of granite fill material to build what he wanted without the necessary permits. Roberts also operated heavy equipment, relocated sand and failed to use lake-friendly construction methods all in highly sensitive lands, according to TRPA spokesman Jeff Cowen.

"We are pleased that the Governing Board agreed with us that this settlement and fine amount is appropriate given the extent of the violations and environmental harm attributable to the unauthorized construction project," TRPA attorney Nicole Rinke said.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

El Dorado County releases BlueGo buses to TTD

The fleet of buses on the South Shore is about to increase by two.

This is because the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors on Jan. 25 voted to allow the Tahoe Transportation District to use the two buses the county took off the road in July. They had been part of the BlueGo service, and will resume being so as long as TTD runs the bus service.



BlueGo buses stored at the county yard in Meyers will be put back in service.

The resolution that was passed by the supervisors stipulates the buses be used to service county residents on the South Shore.

The legal questions pertaining to the county's financial involvement with TTD are still being worked out.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

SLT council discusses idea of not having rep on TRPA board

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Bruce Grego's desire to send a message to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency by not filling the city's seat on the Governing Board was voted down by his colleagues, but not before the idea was well vetted.

Grego's contention is he believes the bi-state regulatory agency interferes with land use issues and stalls progress.



Bruce Grego

"They have been here 40 years and it's the same garbage from them year in and year out," Grego said at the Jan. 25 council meeting.

Mayor Hal Cole said having a city rep on the board is necessary, especially if the Tahoe Valley Community Plan is going to get approved.

Councilman Tom Davis said the problem is the board is "tilted to non-basin residents."

Councilwoman Claire Fortier said, "I think everyone here harbors some kind of feeling against the TRPA, but now is not

the time (to protest).”

Councilwoman Angela Swanson called the appointment potentially the single-most important one on their agenda.

Once the discourse was over, Grego agreed to make a one-year appointment and to have the council revisit the possibility of leaving the TRPA seat vacant if things don’t change in the coming year. Fortier was unanimously appointed to the Governing Board.

The other one-year appointments are:

Angela Swanson:

• California Tahoe Conservancy

• Cal Tahoe JPA

• Waste Management JPA

• Tahoe Transportation District, alternate

Hale Cole:

• City Selection Committee

• Abandoned Vehicle Abatement

• Recreation (Measure S) JPA

Bruce Grego:

• LAFCO

• TTD

• League of California Cities

• Waste Management JPA, alternate

Claire Fortier:

• Tahoe Regional Planning Agency

• Cal Tahoe JPA

Tom Davis:

• Airport Commission

• Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority

• Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, non voting

• South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association, non voting

• TRPA, alternate

• League of California Cities, alternate

Irvin Coe was reappointed the citizen rep to Clean Tahoe. City Manager Tony O'Rourke was directed to pick a staff person to be on Clean Tahoe.

John Collins will resume being the representative on the El Dorado County Commission on Aging.

O'Rourke and City Attorney Patrick Enright will be the PADMA members.

Series of meetings related to Homewood's proposed development

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and Placer County have released the Homewood Mountain Resort Master Plan draft environmental impact report for public review and comment.

Comments will be accepted until March 20.

JMA Ventures, owners of the West Shore resort, want to redevelop the resort's two existing base areas and replace chairlifts. Also included in the master plan proposal are a year-round mid-mountain day lodge and overnight lodging accommodations at the base areas.

Public meeting include:

· Feb. 9 at 9:30am – TRPA Advisory Planning Commission at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency office in Stateline.

· Feb. 10 at 6pm – Placer County North Tahoe Regional Advisory Council at the Tahoe City PUD conference room.

· Feb. 17 at 10am – Placer County Planning Commission at the Granlibakken Resort & Conference Center, Tahoe City.

· Feb. 23 at 9:30am in Kings Beach, the TRPA Governing Board will review the EIR..

Homewood Mountain Resort plans to host an open house tentatively scheduled for March 4 at the South Lodge off of Tahoe Ski Bowl Way from 5-7pm. The open house invites the general public to view exhibits and other updates related to the Homewood Mountain Resort Ski Area Master Plan.

To review the Homewood Mountain Resort Master Plan, go online.

CTC unable to start new projects because of funding

By Kathryn Reed

With the current budget situation in California, the California Tahoe Conservancy is struggling to do more than maintain the status quo.

“Bond money has virtually run out. The remaining funds are earmarked,” CTC Executive Director Patrick Wright told his board last week. “We are probably facing one of the most challenging times for the Conservancy.”

Although Gov. Jerry Brown’s proposed budget doesn’t send chills through the agency, it is giving people pause for what the future may hold because by the 2012-13 budget the bond money should be gone.

“Our success is dependent on the governor and Legislature making the budget work,” Wright said.

A large unknown is what will happen with the proposed water bond that has been delayed in being put before the voters. Tied up in the proposal is money the CTC would get for various environmental improvement projects.

Wright mentioned the nearly $1 million grant awarded last month to the Tahoe region as part of the Sustainable Communities Program. The Tahoe Metropolitan Planning Organization received the $995,000 grant.

Karen Fink, senior planner with the TMPO and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, in the proposal wrote, “The ongoing Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Regional Plan Update (RPU) recognizes the need to transform the outdated, rigid regulatory framework into a system that integrates environmental, land use, transit and housing programs, and encourages redevelopment as a means to meet economic, community and natural resource goals. The Lake Tahoe Prosperity Plan identifies the need for redevelopment to lead the transformation from a declining, seasonal, casino-based economy to a vibrant, year-round, ecotourism and environmental innovation based economy.”

Other items from the Jan. 20 CTC meeting include:

• The acceptance of $200,000 from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for costs associate with restoration plans for the old Tahoe Pines campground in Meyers. (CTC acquired the property in 2007 and had plans to rehab the area.)

• The board authorized spending up to $1.08 million to thin 395 acres of Conservancy-owned land throughout the basin this year.

LTUSD deficit may swell to $2.6 mil.; depends on state

By Kathryn Reed

It's a bit of hoping for the best, planning for worst when it comes to forecasting what the Lake Tahoe Unified School District budgets will look like for the next two years.

Educators have their fingers crossed the proposed June ballot initiative by Gov. Jerry Brown passes. But the reality is it may never see the light of day. That will be determined by the Legislature in March.

The best-case scenario as presented to the board Jan. 25 is the continued running deficit of $1.2 million. The worst-case option is another $1.4 million will be added to that systemic problem to bring the district's ledgers showing $2.6 million in red.

CFO Deb Yates and Human Resources Director Jim Watson

delivered the sobering news Tuesday to a packed house at the district office. Watson went over possible elimination of positions for the next two years. His job is one that could be cut in 2011-12.

This would mean Superintendent Jim Tarwater would spend all of his time at the district office. He currently divides his day as principal of the Environmental Magnet School. Someone would have to take over those duties.

Watson said during a recent webinar a leading economist said what makes this different from previous budgets is “this really is a sky is falling budget to go with the sky is falling rhetoric.”

California is grappling with a $25 billion deficit. For the past several years lawmakers have put a Band-Aid on the issue and deferred some of the more painful decisions. Brown has said he wants to stop that practice and begin making the hard decisions.

He wants voters to continue on with tax hikes that were put into effect two years ago. The Republican Legislature is resisting the Democrat’s idea.

Even if the proposal makes it on the June ballot, that does not give this or most districts much time to figure out what they are doing because most fiscal years begin July 1. This is why LTUSD is essentially working on parallel budgets based on funding possibilities.

The LTUSD board took no action this week. (Sue Novasel was absent.) But action will have to be taken soon even if it means revising things when the state figures out its mess.

Teachers have another week to let the district know if they will be taking the golden handshake retirement option. If enough people pursue early retirement, pink slips will likely not have to be issued for the coming school year.

A slew of ideas were outlined at the meeting as possible ways to maintain solvency. When it comes to positions, reduction in the number of school days or the furlough day, those would have to be negotiated with the unions.

The state allowed districts to go from maintaining a 3 percent reserve to 1 percent for this school year. The proposed budget from Brown says districts will be allowed to maintain a 0.33 percent reserve.

“I’m hearing if this is not the time for reserves, I’m not sure when is. No one I’ve crossed paths with has seen it worse,” Yates told the board.

Placer County yanks rep from TRPA, puts Sevison on board

By Gus Thomson, Auburn Journal

Four Placer County supervisors voted Tuesday to remove fellow supervisor Jennifer Montgomery from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency governing board.

But Montgomery – bolstered by a contingent of supporters who traveled to the Auburn meeting from Tahoe – didn’t go quietly.

Montgomery has served as board appointee to the Tahoe planning panel since her election to the Board of Supervisors four years ago.

A statement by the District 4 supervisor at December’s Tahoe planning board disagreeing with the county’s status quo stance on tourist-accommodation unit transfers for developers raised the hackles of fellow Placer board members.

At Tuesday's meeting, Supervisor Kirk Uhler made the motion to replace Montgomery with her alternate on the board, Larry Sevison. Sevison has served 17 years on the Tahoe board during four stints – including the six months in 2007 after Montgomery's predecessor Bruce Kranz was removed for voting against a board decision at the planning agency panel.

Uhler said Montgomery had a chance at a Board of Supervisors meeting in October to clarify her concerns about tourist accommodation transfers during broader discussion of Tahoe planning issues.

Read the whole story

Midas revokes S. Tahoe franchise, 4 others

By Bob Brundage, Reno Gazette-Journal

Five Midas stores in the Reno-Tahoe area and one in Northern California recently lost their franchises and were forced to close their doors.

Two of the six stores are in Reno, one is in Sparks, one is in Carson City, one in South Lake Tahoe and one is in Placerville.

All of the outlets were owned by Mallard Group Ltd., which could not be reached for comment.

"That would have been in mid-December," said Bob Troyer, director of corporate affairs for Midas, of the closings. "We terminated the franchise we had in place, and we terminated the relationships with that franchise."

Read the whole story

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8 candidates vie for Tahoe Assembly seat

By Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

Seven Republicans and one Democrat met Monday's filing deadline to become candidates for the 4th District Assembly seat left vacant by Ted Gaines' recent move to the state Senate.

GOP candidates are Beth Gaines, Ted Gaines' wife, a homemaker with business experience; Roseville City Councilman John Allard; Cheryl Bly-Chester, founder of Rosewood Environmental Engineering; Matt Williams, a South Lake Tahoe attorney; Rob Matthews, a police officer; Mike O'Connor, a retiree and former Yuba County assistant personnel director; and Bogdan "Bo" Ambrozewicz, a business entrepreneur who has been involved in home and business construction.

Read the whole story

Lively discussion leads to 5 strategies for S. Tahoe

council

By Kathryn Reed

“Credibility is the currency of leadership.”

This was one of the nuggets of information Mike Levinson gave South Lake Tahoe city councilmembers during their three-hour strategic planning session on Jan. 25. Levinson, former city manager of Coral Springs, Fla., and now a consultant, was brought in for $1,500 to facilitate the meeting and offer insight.

After hours of lively discussion, the council came up with five broad priorities to focus on. In no particular order, they are:



Consultant Mike Levinson leads the discussion Jan. 25 about the direction of South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

• Economic development

• Infrastructure/built environment, including public works and

technology

• Public trust, including communication and accountability

• Financial stability

• Partnerships, with private entities, as well as on the local, regional, state and national levels.

From here City Manager Tony O'Rourke will devise bullet points – or action plans that flush out what those five statements mean based on dialog given Tuesday.

"We'll put some meat on this bone," is how O'Rourke put it.

Each councilmember will soon take ownership of one of the bullet points. The idea is to not micromanage the progress of staff, but to be the liaison from staff to the council, and when appropriate to be a voice in the public about the bullet point.

The reason to do this is to give each council person ownership as well as having to be accountable to the electorate they are doing something other casting votes every other Tuesday.

Part of the early discussion was on the results of the citizen survey. Compared against the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis the council did of the city, the results parallel one another, according to Levinson. (*Lake Tahoe News* will be writing about just the survey in the near future.)

"If you take all the data, there is a bold case for change," Levinson said. "There is a lot of room for improvement."

In the free form discussion that led to the ultimate decision to focus on the five issues above, Mayor Hal Cole brought up the idea of the city being more intricately involved in what happens at the foreclosed would-be convention center site. This would be a 180-degree turn from where the city wanted to

have no real part of the project – especially financially.

“We might say this would be our (cultural center),” Cole said. He added how the former contract was laid out, the city might have been able to have 10-days of events at the site.

Councilman Bruce Grego wants to engage Heavenly Mountain Resort or its parent company Vail Resorts about being annexed into the city. (The California Lodge is in El Dorado County.) He is also an advocate of taxing lift tickets even though an amusement tax cannot be implemented for 22 years based on previous contracts.

Banter back and forth culminated with the opinion Heavenly would come to the table, but the city would have to have something to offer – like X number of events a year.

A survey of tourists that was discussed Jan. 25 pointed to how special events get people to the South Shore.

The dialog was not always linear, with topics bouncing all over the place.

Councilwoman Claire Fortier wants to ensure technology, like WiFi, is easy for locals and tourists to tap into.

The sign ordinance was brought up, quickly followed by code enforcement.

“We need a balance between pro business and pro aesthetics,” O’Rourke said of signs.

He proposed working with businesses as Caltrans begins making improvements to Highway 50 this summer and for several years after that. He threw out the idea of making the business community conform based on where Caltrans does its improvements so it all is done in small, manageable segments.

Councilwoman Angela Swanson brought up the desire to get the Prosperity Plan off the ground and finding a way to do so.

Much discussion focused on land use issues, including the cog Tahoe Regional Planning Agency can be in the wheel of progress.

Cole brought up how an issue with the Mikasa building is that TRPA mandates any building more than 50 years old be studied for its historical significance. It was pointed out the better part of the South Shore would fall into this category. The irony being much of the city is deemed a redevelopment area, meaning it has considerable blight.

Playing nice with others was a big component. It was pointed out how the city barely got Lakeview Commons approved because of the acrimonious relationship with El Dorado County.

Cole pointed to how he sat on the TRPA Governing Board with current Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval, adding that relationship should be pursued. Councilman Tom Davis pointed to how the city used to have a lobbyist in Washington who helped secure money for the city.

Grego wants to develop a pool of candidates of people “with our sympathies” to help get placed on boards like Lahontan so perhaps the city would receive favorable treatment.

Levinson said he was surprised this is the first workshop the City Council has had in years, as well as that it doesn’t have a public information officer to carry its message to the public.

The redesign of the city’s website was brought up, with the idea it could be a portal of information about city issues as well as point visitors to appropriate locations.

Davis kept bringing up media relations without elaboration.

Fortier wants to create a recreation hub.

Cole would like the city to work with sections of town to have something like what Ski Run Boulevard developed with its

business improvement district.

The council is expected to drill down on the five priorities at the first meeting in February.