South Tahoe attempting to fix parking nightmares

By Kathryn Reed

Parking in South Lake Tahoe is atrocious. No one disagreed. And all loosely agreed solving the problems will take creative thinking, and recognizing the various sections of town are not all the same when it comes to use and traffic patterns.

About 30 people, mostly property and business owners, gathered at Riva Grill for about two hours Thursday afternoon to talk about how better to serve their driving customers – which is the bulk of people.

Despite years of planners saying the future would see people using their cars less, that theory has never been realized.

“People are going to drive their cars to get where they want to go. That is not going to change,” John Cefalu said.



John Cefalu

Cefalu has lived here for decades and has property in multiple locations along Highway 50.

One of his concerns is where people are going to park once Lakeview Commons is finished. He gave a bit of history how there was a time when people could park on the highway. Caltrans finally stopped that practice, which is how Harrison Avenue was created as a frontage road.

Property owners in the area have not been able to agree on a

plan that the city wants to develop to alleviate congestion and making parking less nightmarish. Cefalu said an idea to create one-way streets had traction with owners, which could help with parking.

A meeting the evening of Oct. 21 was for the public to express what they would like to see. Only one member of the public showed up. (The National League Championship Series with the San Francisco Giants was at the same time.)

The areas of focus covered in the grant are Ski Run Boulevard and Harrison Avenue. But the consultants doing the work are also looking at the Stateline area.

A $30,000 grant from the state's Community Development Block Grant program is paying for a team from Kimley-Horn and Associates, which has offices throughout the country including Reno, to create a plan to improve the situation.

The underlying focus is economic development. Without parking that works, people may not frequent a business. With the lousy reputation the Heavenly Village debt-ridden city-owned garage has year-round and the paid Ski Run Marina lot has during the summer, locals in particular stay away from those areas.

Those gathered want to work on changing public perception.



Business and property owners on Oct. 21 discuss parking in

South
Tahoe.
Photos/Kath
ryn Reed

Janis Rhodes and Brett Wood of the consulting firm are tasked with gathering the information and coming up with solutions by early summer. How to pay for whatever changes might be proposed will be an issue tackled when the ideas come to light.

“They must deliver solutions to the parking problem that the city can deliver,” Nancy Kerry, the city’s housing-redevelopment manager, told *Lake Tahoe News* before the meeting. “We know parking is an issue.”

Metered street parking, parking garages, reconfiguring streets, changing public perception about paid parking, paying attention to public transit-walkers-cyclists, and approving future projects with adequate parking were all broached in the daytime meeting.

Most in the audience agreed more parking and paid parking are likely to be more prevalent in South Tahoe in the near future. And they agreed it would be the locals, who are used to free parking, who will probably be the hardest to convince this is what’s needed.

The consultants started work in July by speaking with nearly 300 people to gather their thoughts on parking in the city. They also have read the 10 or so parking studies the city has commissioned over the years.

In the in-person survey, which mostly tourists answered, about 70 percent said they would be willing to pay for parking.

Another survey is being conducted online through at least the end of the year.

This is another opportunity for locals and tourists to weigh-

in on parking in town and help direct change.

“During summer we spend more time turning people away than parking them,” Riva Grill manager Scott Craig told the group.

He and others wouldn’t mind a multi-story parking garage to be built to accommodate people.

When the Ski Run Marina project was approved parking was inadequate. It’s worse now that businesses occupy the commercial area and Tahoe Queen has multiple cruises nearly daily, but always in the summer.

“At least 150 people, if not more, work in this area. That’s the same number of parking spots,” said Mansoor Alyeshmerni, owner of Ski Run Marina.

When the city and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency approved the marina development the powers that be touted an integrated bus system for the South Shore, but that reality is teetering in and out of bankruptcy court; and despite all the planning for bike trails, asphalt is the missing component to make that real.

Still, Lisa O’Daly with the California Tahoe Conservancy asked if business owners have noticed more people walking or cycling on trails that her agency has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on – mostly in planning.

Brian Des Rochers, president of the Ski Run BID, said he does see people using the sidewalks on the boulevard.

Wood, the consultant, said in the online surveys that have been completed a number of people have commented on how this is not a walking town.

Cefalu brought up how his Fox gas station plows its sidewalks, but he can’t get neighboring businesses to do the same.

This all tied into a discussion about the tourists’ experience

when they are in town – the ability to walk, contend with traffic and park.

Tahoe traffic stop leads to ‘pot factory’ in Chico

By KRCR-TV

CHICO – A traffic stop led drug agents to an alleged pot factory in Chico where they recovered $1.5 million worth of marijuana.

It started October 14 when officers pulled over a driver for speeding on Highway 89 near Lake Tahoe. The driver Robert Daniels, 62, of Chico, gave the the CHP permission to search his truck. CHP officers said they found more than 100 pounds of marijuana in the bed of the Ford. Investigators say the marijuana was processed and stowed in duffel bags.

Daniels claimed it was for medical purposes, but California law does not allow the transport of medical marijuana. Daniels could not provide proof of enough patients to account for the amount of marijuana in the truck.

Read the whole story

Cold, wet weather forecasted for Tahoe this weekend

By National Weather Service

Low pressure near the British Columbia coast will direct a plume of moisture into the Sierra and Western Nevada this weekend.

Light rain and snow may reach the Sierra as early as Friday night, with the heaviest precipitation occurring late Saturday night and Sunday.

Snow levels Saturday will start between 7,000 and 8,000 feet, then rise to near 10,000 feet by Sunday. Light snow accumulations are possible in the Sierra above 8,000 feet Saturday and Saturday night.

As a front moves into the area Sunday, heavy rain is likely to affect the northern Sierra from the Lake Tahoe Basin north into Plumas and Lassen counties. Rainfall amounts up to 1 inch are possible, with potential for higher amounts along and west of Highway 89.

Gusts over the Sierra ridges could approach 100mph during this time.

A colder system may reach the area Monday night and Tuesday, with a chance for snow levels to lowering to 7,000 feet or less across the Sierra and Western Nevada.

Clear Lake officials use Tahoe as model to work on water issues

By Elizabeth Larson, Lake County News

LAKEPORT – What to do about managing Clear Lake's algae and weeds brought together local and federal officials for an informal Friday workshop.

The meeting took place Friday morning in the Board of Supervisors chambers in the Lake County Courthouse in Lakeport.

Those sitting around the table included Congressman Mike Thompson and his district representative Brad Onorato, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works Program Chief Brandon Muncy and Col. Bill Leady, County Administrative Officer Kelly Cox, Supervisors Denise Rushing and Jeff Smith, county Water Resources Director Scott De Leon and his water engineer Tom Smythe, Lake County Chamber of Commerce Chief Executive Officer Melissa Fulton, Dr. Greg Giusti of the University of California Cooperative Extension, Dr. Harry Lyons of Yuba College, Lakeport City Council member Suzanne Lyons, Lakeport City Manager Margaret Silveira, local businesswoman Kathy Fowler and Clearlake Keys resident Dennis Locke.

Cox told the group that the increase in algae issues in recent years – and the accompanying bad press about it – has had devastating effects on the county's economy.

Dr. Harry Lyons noted that the lake has now gone into its "winter regime" due to changes in nutrients, sunlight and weather.

"The system is nonlinear," he said.

He added, “That should leave us optimistic because the more we do the more, in essence, the algae can respond to it.”

Read the whole story

South Tahoe receives $800,000 grant from state

South Lake Tahoe’s grant application to the California Housing and Community Development Department, Community Development Block Program for $800,000 was approved this week.

This means the city’s First-Time Homebuyer Program and Housing Rehabilitation Program for low-income residents will continue. In addition, the grant includes funds to improve access to city facilities for the disabled.

“Once again, the city’s application was focused on going after funds that will create jobs for the local community. This grant will add onto the city’s $1.5 million Lead Based Paint grant to fund construction jobs for local contractors,” said Nancy Kerry with the city’s housing-economic departments. “With the release of this news, we encourage all contractors to contact us and get on our list of approved contractors.”

Buyers will be encouraged to look for foreclosed properties to help stabilize the local housing market, Kerry said.

In addition, about $123,000 of the grant will fund accessibility improvements for the disabled in city facilities.

Media outlets seek to have Garrido indictments unsealed

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

The Bee and five other media companies have filed court papers asking a judge to unseal grand jury transcripts and other documents in the Jaycee Lee Dugard kidnapping case, saying "there is no justification for sealing any records" in the case against Phillip and Nancy Garrido.

Karl Olson, a San Francisco attorney who successfully forced state corrections officials to release Phillip Garrido's parole records in a Bee lawsuit earlier this year, has asked the trial judge in the Garrido case to unseal the grand jury transcripts and motions that have been filed under seal over the past year, and also to allow argument in court over the judge's order to seal certain hearings in the case.

Olson argued in a motion that "no overriding interest overcomes the right of public access to records," and that claiming a defendant's right to a fair trial may be affected is not enough to seal records.

"Nor is it enough for the defendants to argue that this case has received a lot of publicity, for if that were enough to seal records, all records would be sealed in every case that the public cared about," Olson wrote.

Read the whole story

Fall rains will dictate if Lake Tahoe falls below rim

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Officials said they are hopeful that a wet fall will keep Lake Tahoe above its natural rim to provide a continuing flow of water into the Truckee River, but to the south, drought conditions have lowered Lake Mead to its lowest point in nearly 75 years.

Slightly buoyed by October rains, Tahoe's water levels Tuesday were about a half foot above the lake's natural rim. When full, the top 6 feet of Tahoe's waters above the rim are stored by the dam at Tahoe City for use by Reno-Sparks and other downstream users.



Sand bars at the South Shore's Cove East in September. Photo/Kathryn Reed

If conditions are dry this fall, Tahoe should drop below its rim and the dam's gates by the end of the year, said Chad Blanchard, chief deputy water master. Continued rains could prevent that from occurring.

“It hopefully won’t happen at all,” Blanchard said.

The situation is far different at Lake Mead, which serves the Las Vegas area.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe extends moratorium on pot collectives 1 year

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe City Council’s unanimous decision to extend the moratorium on medical marijuana collectives for a year may be met with a lawsuit from a fourth collective that has been trying to operate in the city.

During the public hearing the morning of Oct. 19, Chris Ziegler pleaded his case to the council to allow Mountain Collective be given the same rights the three authorized dispensaries have.

“I feel like I keep getting punted down the road. I have been trying to be an asset to the community,” Ziegler told the council.



Jacqueline

Mittelstadt and Chris Ziegler listen Oct. 19 to council deliberations. Photo/Kathryn Reed

This time he was shutdown by the council in person.

Ziegler's attorney, Jacqueline Mittelstadt, also spoke Tuesday. She referenced an Oct. 17 letter she had sent to the council and City Attorney Patrick Enright. (Mittelstadt is the former city attorney for South Lake Tahoe.)

After the meeting, Mittelstadt told *Lake Tahoe News* grounds for a lawsuit are based on the emergency ordinance that was first adopted Nov. 17, 2009, and extended for another year at Tuesday's meeting not being legal, and the decision on Ziegler's appeal by Enright and then City Manager Dave Jinkens on July 16, 2010, not being legal or invalid.

Ten other people spoke during the public hearing – some for the moratorium, some against it.

Council members didn't have much to say before the 5-0 vote. Councilman Hal Cole did say, "I think medical marijuana is here and is here to stay."

He also believes the needs to the community are being met with the three collectives, pointing to Oakland, a city many times larger than South Lake Tahoe, having four collectives.

The extension of the emergency moratorium cannot be extended beyond the year the council approved on Oct. 19.

It was brought up by some of the speakers that now is the time to convene a committee to work on an ordinance the city,

collectives and residents can live with. While people made that suggestion, City Manager Tony O'Rourke was nodding his head in agreement. O'Rourke has been at the head of the table during meetings to write the medical marijuana cultivation ordinance which on Tuesday, was postponed for a vote until after the Nov. 2 election.

Clinical setting prepares nurses for real world scenarios

By Lenita Powers, Reno Gazette-Journal

A newly renovated nursing wing dedicated at Truckee Meadows Community College will better prepare students to deal with real life hospital situations, said Karen Fontaine, director of TMCC's nursing program.

She said it is a boon to nursing students because of increased pressure from potential employers to hire graduates who have been exposed to clinical settings.

"A student might not see a diabetic with low blood pressure, but we can create that situation by simulating a hospital experience," she said. "One of the best things about simulations is students do get to learn the skills they need; but the best thing is it really helps them develop their critical thinking skills."

The $550,000 renovation of the nursing wing at the college's main Dandini Campus north of Reno includes a simulation laboratory and medication dispensing system as well as an

electronic medical record-keeping system.

Read the whole story

Senior meals, law-justice, library – on EDC hit list

By Kathryn Reed

If the $5.5 million in budget cuts El Dorado County plans to make before the new year are approved as presented Tuesday by CAO Gayle Erbe-Hamlin, say goodbye to the senior nutrition program throughout the county, look for library hours to be reduced, roads to not be repaired, and $1 million eliminated from the sheriff's department budget.

The Board of Supervisors on Oct. 19 was given the grim news. Erbe-Hamlin called it "ugly."

It's been well documented the county is facing an $11 million deficit for fiscal year 2011-12, which begins July 1.

Click on proposal to see what was presented Tuesday in Placerville.

If the $400,000 for the senior nutrition program were cut, that would wipeout the five centers the county operates. This includes the food program at the South Lake Tahoe Senior Center and meals-on-wheels. These programs can be the only meals seniors receive.

Daniel Nielson, who runs the Department of Social Services, was not available to talk about the food program late Tuesday.

At the South Lake Tahoe branch library, the half position that has not been filled is scheduled to be cut. Expect hours to be slashed, too. A Sept. 20 PowerPoint presentation to the board outlines ways to trim the library budget.

The goal of the supervisors is to tackle half the deficit in the coming weeks. A special board meeting is scheduled for Nov. 3 to solely talk about the budget. Next week county staff will be in South Lake Tahoe to brief basin residents about the financial woes.

If the board doesn't resolve the issue the day after Election Day, it has regular meetings Dec. 7 and Dec. 14, but is dark the previous two weeks and last two weeks of December. Another special meeting could be called.

The remaining $5.5 million is likely to be dealt with right after the first of the year.

"We'll have a more clear picture for the 2011-12 year once the first $5.5 million is addressed. Then we have to do it again. This is a difficult conversation now and in February it will be harder, I think," said Jim Mitrisin, assistant to Chief Administrative Officer Erbe-Hamlin.

Mitrisin cautioned the proposed cuts are "very preliminary."

Still, with the time line the supes want to follow combined with the cuts in services and staff that have been made in recent years, the low hanging fruit was plucked long ago.

Some say the financial abyss the county finds itself in is a result of the state trying to balance its budget on the back of local jurisdictions.

El Dorado County can also point to a significant drop in property valuations decreasing the amount of property tax it

collects, along with sales tax dropping during the recession.

There was a time when construction was robust on the West Slope. Now it’s practically at a standstill.

Although supervisors have said law and justice were sacred, that’s not entirely so with Erbe-Hamlin’s proposal on Tuesday. Her idea is to find more than $1.6 million in savings by mandating a 2.7 percent cut each for sheriff, probation, district attorney, and public defender.

Sheriff Fred Kollar did not return a call Tuesday.

Perhaps the diminishing flow of cash is why the CAO has said the economic coordinator position can be scrapped. However, the nearly half million dollars in promotional funds – which is discretionary income from the hotel tax – is not slated to be touched.

Follow what the county is doing via the Board of Supervisors’ webpage.