South Tahoe working on creating functional website

By Kathryn Reed

With no discussion about why the cost of the new website for South Lake Tahoe has nearly doubled, the council OK'd the $38,047 expenditure on a 5-0 vote.

Even though awarding the contract to CivicPlus out of Kansas was on the consent agenda Sept. 14, Councilman Hal Cole pulled it to talk about website content. He wants to ensure people landing on the current site seeking tourism information will be directed to the appropriate places in the future. As it is now, the city's website is just about government business.

Christine Vuletich, city finance director, told Cole he was a step ahead of everyone and that, yes, the appropriate links will be included in the redesign.

"All the city departments and others will be involved in designing the website," Vuletich said.

Mayor Kathay Lovell asked for staff to send out examples of websites CivicPlus has done so the economic committee of Cole and Councilman Jerry Birdwell could take a look at them. However, in the council's packet of information that day were examples of designs CivicPlus has done for Emeryville, Windsor, Mammoth Lakes, Maui and others.

South Lake Tahoe's current site is 7-years-old and has always been difficult to navigate. It is not intuitive and information is often difficult to find.

Compounding the problem is some departments have created their

own, separate site instead of having them be extensions of the city's primary site. These sites will be consolidated into the main site during the redesign so there is uniformity.

The funding is budgeted in the 2009-10 budget, with $18,000 having been allocated from the economic development account. The $20,047 comes from the website capital improvement project account.

City staff determined it didn't make sense to pay the $18,000 allocated for the old "prospector" website, so that's how the design team wound up with more money.

The new site will be up and running some time in 2011.

South Lake Tahoe council candidates delve into issues

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Fiscal responsibility and transparency in government were overriding themes of the nine South Lake Tahoe City Council candidates who attended the first forum of the election season. One person chose not to attend.

Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe hosted the Sept. 22 event at Harrah's Lake Tahoe. Based on the order they will appear on the ballot, candidates gave one-minute opening statements. Then they each answered four questions.



Soroptimist Ann Swallow asks the candidates questions Sept. 22. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Some substance and true examples of what they want to do was provided. Plenty of rhetoric and cliché responses were part of the mix. Sometimes the question was never answered.

Doug Cichowicz is concerned about how tax dollars are spent and believes there is waste at all levels of government.

Joy Curry wants to move South Lake Tahoe forward by improving the community, making it safe, and creating transparency in government.

Steve Kubby believes it’s impossible to be a First World resort town with Third World roads and bikes.

Adrian Gooch says having worked for the city in redevelopment gives her the advantage of knowing the nuts and bolts of how the organization works. She wants to put pride back into the community.

Alice Jones would use her knowledge as a certified public accountant to help get the city on secure financial ground, work on long-range planning, and look into dealing with aging infrastructure.

Claire Fortier believes economic stability will come from geotourism, recreation and green business.

Angela Swanson opened with not asking for the group's vote, but instead their support, explaining a new vision for South Tahoe will take the effort of everyone in that room and outside those four walls to bring change – that it can't be done by just five councilmembers.

Georg May agrees there needs to be change and experience is important, but doesn't believe that a person has to have lived here nearly a lifetime to contribute to the future good.

Tom Davis, who has been off the council for the last six years after serving for 12, said when things are bad is when great leadership is needed – and said he is the one with those leadership skills.

Question No. 1: Criticism has been leveled on some in this race for having a distinct agenda. But the truth is everyone has an agenda, some call it a platform or issues, for why they are running. Describe your agenda.

Davis: The economy is his agenda. But he said it would take a council that can work together to bring change.

Cichowicz: Fiscal responsibility. He doesn't understand why Industrial Avenue was repaved instead of streets that have heavier use.

Curry: She wants her children and grandchildren to be able to live in South Lake Tahoe with successful jobs.

Kubby: He believes the city is treating businesses like ATM machines and that needs to end. He wants the council to get back to basics – roads and bike paths.

Gooch: She, too, wants to get back to basics, to have the council set sound policy, be approachable, honest and operate with transparency.

Jones: She has two small children for whom she wants to help build a stable community through teamwork and long-range planning, as well as looking at expenditures and why no money was in the budget for roads during fiscally sound years of just a few years ago.

Fortier: She's seeking a vibrant community through economic stability via creating a first-class recreation destination.

Swanson: She said it's not her agenda she will bring to the council, but what she hears from the people as she walks the streets. They are telling her they want the basics to be better.

May: He wants a more sustainable community. To pay for improvements he proposes taxing water bottles and getting everyone in government to be able to write grants.

Question No. 2: PERS, the Public Employee Retirement System, is a drain on the city's budget. How would you change the city's benefits package for employees?

Curry: She likes how the city has been working to make changes and believes it's important to be responsible with city contracts. She supports furlough days as a way to reduce costs. She also believes city employees deserve health benefits and a retirement.

Kubby: He doesn't understand how the Finance Department has nine employees, especially when the city has a $3 million deficit. He pointed to retirement packages being a statewide issue.

Gooch: She just started collecting PERS. She said there are other agencies in the basin with better benefits than the city. She supports the changes that have been made, but does not believe more needs to be done.

Jones: She wants to compare South Lake Tahoe benefits to other

cities the same size. But she also recognizes that if salary and benefit packages are cut too much, it will be difficult to find qualified people to hire.

Fortier: She pointed out the two ways of balancing a budget – putting money in, or taking money out. She would like to review PERS and the entire budget.

Swanson: With the city having seven bargaining units and a projected $12 million deficit over the next three years, she believes being a good employer means looking at the long-term issues.

May: He doesn't want double standards with some employees getting one thing and new hires another.

Davis: Of the approximately 200 city employees, about half are employed by the police or fire department. He wants the best workers possible, but also wants the city to live within its means.

Cichowicz: He doesn't believe it makes sense to only cut at the bottom. He wants PERS to be changed.

Question No. 3: The City Council also acts as the directors for the Redevelopment Agency. Many years ago the meetings were distinct, the agendas were distinct. Now it's all blurred with most of the public assuming the council is making the redevelopment decisions. There was even a time when the mayor was not in charge of the agency portion of the meeting. Would you leave the status quo, revert to the old ways or have some other way to handle business for the two entities? And why?

May: He talked in general about redevelopment without answering the question.

Davis: He didn't really answer the question except loosely to say there needs to be better outreach to the community.

Cichowicz: He didn't answer the question, and instead talked

about the convention center project.

Curry: She just talked about how wonderful redevelopment is.

Kubby: He sees redevelopment as a disease.

Gooch: She was the first person to quasi answer the question. She explained the City Council and Redevelopment meetings were thrown into one meeting to capture everyone who came to a council meeting. She didn't elaborate if she would keep the status quo or not.

Jones: She's adamant the council should oversee redevelopment and questions some of the accounting practices in redevelopment.

Fortier: She grasped the question – it had to do with transparency. But she didn't answer the question. She wants everyone to understand the ramifications of redevelopment.

Swanson: She wants transparency to come through having study sessions so the process is slowed down so the public understands the process and/or project.

Question No. 4: Will you be taking the city's health benefits, which is one of the perks of being a councilmember? Why or why not?

Kubby: He thinks he may need them by the time the job is done.

Gooch: With no past employee being elected to the council, the issues with getting retiree medical benefits at the same time as council benefits has not been dealt with. She believes she'll use council benefits as her supplemental source.

Jones: Undecided.

Fortier: Undecided.

Swanson: Maybe.

May: No.

Davis: Yes, as a supplemental to Medicare, which he goes on in January.

Cichowicz: Not likely.

Curry: No.

The South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association, South Tahoe Association of Realtors and *Lake Tahoe News* will be putting on a candidates' forum Oct. 14. More details will be posted soon.

Lake Tahoe News sent questions to the council and Douglas County Commission candidates to garner their viewpoints on a range of topics. Responses will be printed starting Oct. 1.

Garrido indictments may speed up trial in Dugard case

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

Prosecutors in the kidnap-rape trial of Phillip and Nancy Garrido apparently have changed gears, moving to get the El Dorado County grand jury to indict the couple and move the case to trial without going through a preliminary hearing, Nancy Garrido's attorney said this afternoon.

Stephen Tapson said he had been told that the couple were indicted by the grand jury Monday or this morning but that he would not receive official word until a transcript of the grand jury session was completed.



Phillip and Nancy Garrido

District Attorney Vern Pierson could not be reached today, but Tapson said the net effect of the move would be to have the pending charges against the couple dismissed at the next scheduled hearing on Oct. 1. The new indictment would preclude the need for a preliminary hearing that had been set to begin Oct. 7, and would allow the new charges to be sent directly to a trial court, possibly speeding up proceedings that already have dragged on for 13 months.

Read the whole story

43% in El Dorado County have at least 2-year degree

By Laurel Rosenhall, Sacramento Bee

Sacramento County is typical of California in the portion of the population that is college-educated, according to a report being released today by a foundation advocating that more people go to college.

The report from the Lumina Foundation says that in Sacramento County and across California, 38 percent of working-age adults (age 25-64) hold at least a two-year college degree.

Other counties in the region have a more highly educated population. In El Dorado County, 43 percent of adults have at least a two-year degree; the number was 47 percent in Placer County and 49 percent in Yolo County, home to the University of California, Davis.

Read the whole story

Wreck snarls traffic on I-80 at state line

By Reno Gazette-Journal

7:55 a.m. update: Interstate 80 is expected to be closed in both directions at the Nevada-California line until about 9 a.m. as crews clean up an accident, the California Highway Patrol reports.

Additionally, drivers in both directions can expect delays until about 11 a.m. as crews repair a divider wall damaged by a tractor-trailer crash this morning.

The Nevada Highway Patrol has escorted a tow truck to the scene of a crash on Interstate 80 about three-quarters of a mile west of the state line, the CHP dispatch in Truckee reported.

Read the whole story

Gibbons recovering from fall off horse

By Reno Gazette-Journal

Gov. Jim Gibbons remained in the hospital overnight after taking a fall off a horse north of Pyramid Lake Tuesday afternoon, spokesman Dan Burns said this morning.

Burns said he is heading to Renown Regional Medical Center to get an update on Gibbons' condition.



Jim Gibbons

Read the whole story

Extrication drill keeps firefighters sharp for real emergency

By Kathryn Reed

By the time firefighters were done, it looked like a wrecking yard at the end of Lodi Avenue. Mangled vehicles littered the

pavement that in winter is used by Caltrans crews as snow storage.

“It gave guys a chance to cut the doors off, roofs off and all the normal stuff we do in a good vehicle wreck to get to patients. They pushed the dash out to make room for people’s legs,” explained Tyler Jack, South Lake Tahoe firefighter.



South Shore firefighters practice extrication drills. Photos/Tyler Jack

As the department’s vehicle extrication specialist, Jack arranged for the three days of training last week for South Lake Tahoe, Lake Valley, U.S. Forest Service and CalFire crews.

The 25 vehicles provide by individuals, Emerald Bay Towing and Welcome’s Auto Body looked drivable at the beginning of the day. By the end of the exercise they were reduced to a mass of metal.

Realistic scenarios rescue personnel could encounter in the Lake Tahoe Basin were staged – including creating a rock cropping as though a vehicle had gone over Echo Summit or Emerald Bay.

An old BlueGo bus was tilted on its side for firefighters to

practice rescuing large numbers of people at once.

Everyone being trained sat through a three-hour PowerPoint to learn about new vehicles and the various safety restraint systems. With airbags being in different locations, this is something rescue personnel need to understand before they are at the accident scene.

The group earned two certificates – continuing education units and a state fire marshal one that can be put toward firefighter 1 and firefighter 2 designations.

Jack is working on creating a larger training exercise next year for departments throughout California and Nevada that could involve cutting up 90 vehicles.

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Thinning project irks North Shore residents

By Will Frampton, News 10

Hundreds of trees have been removed near Tahoe City this summer for fire prevention.

The 150-acre area that has been cleared, known as the Ward Creek Park project, is the largest of its kind in the area in recent years, according to area fire protection officials.

A spokeswoman for California State Parks said the trees have been cleared because they’ve grown too thick, due to fire suppression efforts of the last 100-plus years.

“We have gotten these really dense forests that are unhealthy,” said Tamara Sasaki of California State Parks.

Some nearby residents are dismayed at how it looks now after a full summer of tree clearing.

Read the whole story

Kings Beach playground about to get new equipment

Kings Beach is getting new playground equipment.

The North Tahoe Public Utility District Board of Directors awarded the bid and authorized the general manager to execute a contract with Dyer and Associates for purchase and installation of playground equipment, fall material and curbing. The playground equipment will include a play structure for children ages 5–12, swing sets and spring rider play equipment.

There will be tot swings for younger children and traditional swing sets for older children.

The only swing sets in the district are those at Kings Beach Elementary School, which do not include tot swings. This equipment will all meet current playground safety and ADA standards. This playground equipment will replace the old equipment that was removed last year because it did not meet current safety standards.

The district’s Recreation and Parks Commission had been spearheading grant writing and fund-raising efforts that had brought in more than $35,000. In addition, a grant has been

submitted to the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association for an additional $44,000, with the remaining $61,000 for the project having come from the district's Recreation and Parks reserves.

The North Tahoe Public Utility District provides sewer and water service to the residents of Kings Beach, Tahoe Vista, Carnelian Bay, Cedar Flat and Agate Bay. The district owns, manages and maintains the North Tahoe Regional Park in Tahoe Vista which provides recreation opportunities to residents and visitors. In addition, the district owns and/or maintains all of the public beaches in the district including Kings Beach State Recreation Area, Tahoe Vista Recreation Area, and Secline Beach to name just a few. The North Tahoe Event Center in downtown Kings Beach is also owned and managed by the district.

Mild wildfire season throughout Nevada

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada will close 2010 with less land burned by wildfire than any other year but one in the past decade, barring any late-season surprises.



Only 15 fires larger than 100 acres were recorded over the year across the Silver State as of Friday. They charred 21,688 acres, according to the Western Great Basin Coordination Center.

Only in 2003, when 17,546 acres burned, did the state lose

less land.

“What happened, especially for Nevada, was we saw lots of southwesterly flow which can produce wind but not a lot of lightning,” said Rick Ochoa, predictive services meteorologist for the fire center. “In the West, we never had the really hot spells followed by the dry lightning.”

Read the whole story