# Thunder Valley's upgrades designed to challenge Tahoe-Reno

**By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee**

C.J. Graham is a master multitasker. With less than a week to go before the Thursday grand opening of Thunder Valley Casino's new hotel, spa and expanded gaming area, there is no time for otherwise.

He and the tribal owners have high hopes for Thunder Valley. The United Auburn Indian Community – with Graham as general manager – wants to transform the casino and surrounding amenities from a regional draw to a luxury resort that can compete with Lake Tahoe, Reno and even Las Vegas.

"I could drop this in the middle of the Las Vegas strip and compete with anyone," Graham said.

Graham and casino owners want to persuade Bay Area gamblers to forgo a plane flight to Las Vegas or the drive to Reno or Lake Tahoe and spend their time and money at Thunder Valley.

**Read the whole story**

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# 2 additional candidates interviewed for SLT city

# manager

**By Kathryn Reed**

Four members of the South Lake Tahoe City Council met from 11:15am-2pm on Sunday in closed session to interview two candidates for city manager.

No action was taken.

This came exactly one week after the elected officials interviewed two other men for the position. It is not known if the other candidates are out of the running or if the council was feeling the heat of public opinion for only interviewing two people for such a key position.

Councilman Bill Crawford did not attend either session.

It is not known if or when these two candidates would be interviewed by the public and two employee panels the other two faced. With the July 4 weekend days away and next week a short week, timing could be an issue.

As time draws on, the clock is ticking to find someone for the city's top job before City Manager Dave Jinkens is expected to leave Aug. 7. Jinkens has told some city employees he would be willing to stay on longer.

One of Crawford's issues from the get-go was that a process should be put in place for an interim city manager in case someone was not hired before Jinkens' eight-year tenure came to an end. He also wanted the next council – three positions are up this November – to choose the next city manager.

Crawford also took issue with only two people being interviewed. There was no evidence before last week's interviews that more people would be brought in.

Without the public involved in the process to-date with the latest candidates, it's unknown if different questions were asked of the latest candidates in light of the El Dorado County Grand Jury report coming out last week.

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# DUI checkpoint, increased patrols Independence weekend

The Avoid the 6 El Dorado County DUI Task Force will be out in full force during the 4th of July holiday weekend, cracking down on impaired drivers with an aggressive DUI enforcement blitz.

"Driving while drunk isn't worth the tremendous risk. No matter your age, if you've had too much holiday spirit, you'd better find a safe and sober ride home or your chances of arrest are high," acting Police Chief Martin Hewlett of the South Lake Tahoe Police Department said in a statement.

Police, sheriff and the CHP will be putting additional officers on the streets and highways over the holiday weekend staffing one DUI/driver's license checkpoint and four local DUI Roving Saturation Patrols.

CHP will also deploy all available officers during their maximum enforcement period patrolling freeways, state highways and county roads in their jurisdiction.

South Lake Tahoe police cite state statistics to underscore

the importance of the crackdown. In 2009 during the July 4th holiday period of July 3-6 there were 373 alcohol involved deaths and injuries on California roadways.

California's three-year Independence Day holiday alcohol involved collision data:

2009 – 30 killed 363 injured

2008 – 50 killed 498 injured

2007 – 30 killed 262 injured

"Too many people still fail to understand that alcohol and driving don't mix. Impaired driving is no accident, nor is it a victimless crime. With 1,233 people killed during the past three July 4th holidays, it's vitally important to stop this destruction of lives and futures," Christopher Murphy, director of the California Office of Traffic Safety, said in a press release.

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# Arson suspect behind bars

A 22-year-old transient was arrested Saturday at about 7:15am on arson charges.

Police officers and firefighters responded to the meadow behind the residential subdivision of Pioneer Village, east of Al Tahoe Boulevard, in South Lake Tahoe after a resident reported a suspicious fire.



Luke Dons

Emergency personnel found an uncontrolled fire approximately 10-feet-square, with 1-foot-high flames. The fire was burning in a wooded and brushy area, only 100 feet from the houses adjacent to the meadow.

Luke Dons, sleeping on the ground about 20 feet away, confessed to starting the fire, without explaining any reason why, according to Officer Matt Morrison.

The fire caused no damage to private property.

Dons was booked into the El Dorado County Jail on $40,000 bail.

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# California welfare recipients withdrawing money at casinos

**By Jack Dolan, Los Angeles Times**

California welfare recipients using state-issued debit cards withdrew more than $1.8 million in taxpayer cash on casino floors between October 2009 and last month, state officials said Thursday.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger issued an executive order requiring welfare recipients to promise they will use cash benefits only

to “meet the basic subsistence needs” of their families. The order also gave the state Department of Social Services seven days to produce a plan to reduce other types of “waste, fraud and abuse” in the welfare program.

The moves came after the *Times* reported Wednesday that officials at the department failed to notice for years that welfare recipients could use the state-issued cards to withdraw taxpayer cash at more than half of the tribal casinos and state-licensed poker rooms in California. The state initiated the debit card program in 2002.

**Read the whole story**

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# South Tahoe City Council to meet Sunday

The South Lake Tahoe City Council is having a special closed session meeting on Sunday at 11:15am at Lake Tahoe Airport.

The subject is the city manager.

As of Friday night, it was not known if anyone new would be there to interview, if one of the two interviewed last weekend would be hired, or if the whole process might start from scratch.

The council has expressed interest in interviewing two more people so there would be a bigger pool to choose from. It has not been confirmed they will be in South Lake on Sunday.

Perhaps a question to any city manager candidate should be: How would you react/respond to the grand jury report that was released this week?

# Ranching threatened in El Dorado County

**Publisher's note:** ***Click here to read about the resource map the Board of Supervisors approved.***

**By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee**

Ed Borba's hat, mustache, oversized belt buckle and boots suggest a rancher. The bumper sticker on his truck completes the picture. It reads, "Eat Beef: The West Wasn't Won on Salad."

The cattleman's West, though, hasn't been won definitively.

Borba and others in El Dorado County are fighting to preserve the ranching way of life and its contribution to the local economy. The struggle is against development pressures, and they've found allies among the environmentalists who have often been the enemies of ranchers.

**Read the whole story**

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# Grand jury chastises South Lake's council, city manager

**By Kathryn Reed**

Dysfunctional is the overwhelming feeling the El Dorado County Grand Jury has of the city of South Lake Tahoe – primarily the council and city manager.

The seven pages devoted to South Lake Tahoe in the 2009-10 Grand Jury Report that came out this week are scathing.

“Council members and senior staff are unwilling or afraid to address and deal with the existing hostile work environment,” the report says.

“Bickering”, “nitpicking”, “back biting”, “bush league” – those are some of the words and phrases in the report.

This civil grand jury made up of 19 county residents issues a report each June based on its investigations during the past year. This particular report touches on the Brown Act, council behavior, Councilman Bruce Grego’s repayment of an outside legal counsel bill, City Manager Dave Jinken’s behavior, how City Attorney Patrick Enright coached staff to talk to the grand jury, and the general climate of the city.

The panel interviewed at least three council members –Kathay Lovell, Bill Crawford and Hal Cole. Councilman Jerry Birdwell said no one from the grand jury contacted him nor did he contact them. Grego did not return calls to *Lake Tahoe News*.

Others interviewed by some of the grand jury members or the full panel include this reporter, appointed city staff (the city manager and city attorney are the only ones who fit that category), city employees, and a trainer of municipal officers and employees. It is not known if other media were questioned.

The document, which is a public record but is not currently on the county's website, rips into how the council works together, or rather, doesn't work together.

Cole concurred with this assessment, adding that he, too, believes personal agendas take precedence over policy. He hopes three candidates come forward for the November election who will change the makeup of the council so it functions better.

(Lovell is running, Crawford isn't, Birdwell is weighing his options.)

Cole was also critical of this reporter who has written about actions from closed session. He said that was wrong. One item reported was the vote on what to do with Officer Johnny Poland. Some council members believed that vote needed to be disclosed based on the Brown Act, others disagreed.

One of the recommendations of the grand jury is for the council to adopt a code of conduct and ethics and receive conflict resolution training.

"I do disagree with their thought that the City Council has not had appropriate ethical trainings," Crawford said. "It's mandated by law we have an ethics session every two years and we have done that. I think the grand jury is correct, if I read between the lines, that there is a question among the City Council about ethical behavior."

The grand jury addressed Grego's reimbursement of nearly $1,000 to have attorney Dennis Crabb handle a potential conflict of interest issue with the Fair Political Practices Commission.

The grand jury wrote, "California State Law clearly states that government contracts for payment may not be backdated. All unusual expenditures should be approved in open session."

District Attorney Vern Pierson did not return a call asking him if his office would revisit the issue now that the grand jury has weighed in.

The report further states, “Testimony supports that City officers and employees at times operate using accepted historical practices that conflict with official written policy. This has resulted in misunderstandings, contentious City Council meetings, and a public impression that the City’s government operates outside the law. These misconceptions could expose the City to lawsuits.”

It accuses Enright of crossing the line when it came to coaching staff about what to tell the grand jury.

Enright said via email, “… I have barely had a chance to review the report and will need to review it carefully next week before responding.”

The grand jury essentially said the council abdicated its responsibility at crucial times.

“The City Council, when facing controversial issues or after threat of litigation, routinely drops issues, even if addressing the issue would improve the function of government or service to the public,” the report says.

Another issue brought up in the report is all of the couples who work for the city. South Tahoe does not have a nepotism policy. The report shows how staff is afraid to say something about one person for fear of retaliation for being critical of a family member. The report says the city needs to address this issue to create a better work environment.

Jinkens took the brunt of the heat from the grand jury.

“The City Manager, fearing loss of supervisory control of the Finance Director, advised the City Council that the Finance Director would probably file an official complaint against the

City Attorney and the City charging them with harassment if the move took place. This statement was viewed by some employees as a threat by the City Manager," the report says.

One of the confusing things about the report that will make it hard for the public to understand is that just titles are used and not names. With there having been two city attorneys for much of the time of the investigation and different mayors part of the time, it takes knowing a bit of the city's history to know who is who.

Based on stories written by *Lake Tahoe News*, the above reference is to when Jacqueline Mittelstadt was city attorney. Mittelstadt did not respond to a request to comment on the report.

When the report takes issue with the mayor not putting something on the agenda, it is Lovell they are talking about.

Other references to Jinkens in the report include, "During a contentious June 30, 2009 City Council meeting it was suggested that the City Manager should resign. Testimony received indicated the City Manger later threatened to file a Workers Compensation claim, hire outside counsel and sue the City."

It further says, "The City Manager used intimidation to retain control over parts of government."

Jinkens sent an email to the council, Enright and City Clerk Suzie Alessi on Thursday afternoon that he shared with *Lake Tahoe News* the next day. It says, "While I do not agree with all of their conclusions and their understanding of the facts in all cases, I understand their right of the Grand Jury to examine the operation of local government and report their findings. My hope is that the very unpleasant experiences of the last year that we have endured will be lessons that will help us all to build a more positive and productive future for the people we serve."

Jinkens, whose last day is Aug. 7, did not want to talk further about the report. He said he and Enright will create a draft response for the City Council in the next two weeks. The council has 90 days to respond to the report.

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# BlueGo routes to change; MV files multiple lawsuits




**By Kathryn Reed**

Bus routes through the South Shore are expected to change July 14, the day after the South Lake Tahoe City Council votes on the proposal. What happens if the council votes no is not known.

The major changes would be eliminating the Meyers route and the Stateline-Zephyr Cove route, as well as making service along Highway 50 available every 30 minutes.

People without a bus stop would be able to pay the $4 fee for on-demand service to take them to the nearest transit center. They would be given a free transfer to be able to continue to their final destination.

The one-way fee for a trip on BlueGo is $2, so this change will cost people more money.

The difference with this route reconfiguration compared to

ones brought forward by the former transit operator is these are designed to save money, according to STATA member Kathay Lovell.

Gordon Shaw of LSC Transportation Consultants was at the June 4 STATA meeting to present a plan of action to the board. Besides a few tweaks, much of what was said at that meeting was reiterated June 25. The board chose not to look beyond September. It intends to revisit routes and monetary issues on a monthly basis.

In a long, somewhat disjointed meeting Friday, the South Tahoe Area Transportation Authority board approved these route changes, a $4.6 million budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1, and to table where the interim operator will work.

The 10am meeting started in the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency office with Lovell questioning paying $2,200 a month to lease a building on Elks Point Road. She favors having everyone at the bus garage in the city.

Banter went back and forth about how much space TRC, the consultant/operator needs, plus how secure the bus garage is for STATA's accountant. It will be brought back at a future meeting.

STATA has been paying TRPA $80,000/year to use office space and for staff time. The reason to move is to save money.

TRC would write that $2,200 check to the landlord, but the money comes via STATA as a pass through. That figure is part of the total fee STATA pays TRC. The contract between STATA and TRC is for the latter to receive $460,000 a year, according to STATA spokeswoman Stacy Dingman.

"When we get to a long term, three- to five-year contract, the cost structure will be completely different," Dingman said after the meeting.

Forty minutes into the meeting the board went into closed session for about 2.5 hours. There they discussed litigation, the budget and the operating plan.

MV Transportation, the company that had been operating BlueGo and other components of the transit system since last summer, ceased doing so as of June 20. MV has filed a lawsuit in El Dorado County Superior Court against STATA and all member agencies in an attempt to be paid nearly $2 million for services rendered.

MV has also filed a suit in Solano County Superior Court, where it's based, against TRC for intentionally interfering in its contract with STATA.

MV has also filed a writ in Douglas County District Court to freeze STATA's assets. The agency's main bank account is tied to this action. For now, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office has control of it.

Dingman said bills are getting paid and that the action is not hampering operations.

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# Garrido lawyer wants client to see Dugard before trial

**By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee**

As the Jaycee Lee Dugard kidnapping case drags on, Nancy Garrido's lawyer suggested today that Dugard and her two children should be allowed to visit Garrido before the trial begins.

Attorney Stephen Tapson said after a five-minute court hearing

today that he believes it would be better for Dugard to see Nancy Garrido in a private setting before she sees her stand trial in Dugard’s kidnapping.

“She loves those kids, she loves Jaycee,” Tapson said. “This is a relationship born in evil, but she loves them and misses them.”

**Read the whole story**