

Canadian provinces introduce housing tax to cool market

By Rob Gillies, AP

Foreign nationals who don't live in Toronto and its surrounding communities will pay an additional 15 percent tax on homes under legislation proposed by the Ontario government.

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne made the announcement Thursday in an effort to cool a hot housing market in Canada's largest city.

It matches the 15 percent tax the Pacific coast city of Vancouver has implemented. Wynne said the tax is not about targeting immigrants.

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LT Humane Society chief fired; police involved



Lake Tahoe Humane Society intends to remain in business despite alleged internal embezzlement.
Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Humane Society's fired executive director is accused of stealing thousands of dollars from the organization and spending the bulk of the money at a Stateline casino.

Niki Congero was suspended by the three-member board of directors on March 14, with termination coming on March 31.

The board has gone to the South Lake Tahoe Police Department with documents showing that Congero withdrew money on a regular basis using the agency's ATM card at Dotty's Casino in Stateline, sometimes multiple times in a day and for as much as \$1,000 at a time.

Police officers did not want to make a comment about an ongoing investigation. They have obtained a search warrant and are pursuing the embezzlement allegations.

What first alerted the Humane Society to there being financial issues was a number of overdraft charges from its bank in early March.

Congero had been with the South Lake Tahoe nonprofit since December 2013. It is believed the alleged embezzlement began

the following summer and escalated as time went on.

When reached by phone Congero said she would call *Lake Tahoe News* back, but has yet to do so. She has started a new organization called Lake Tahoe SPCA. It claims to be a nonprofit, but is not registered as such with the IRS.

The Humane Society board issued the following statement to *LTN*, "In early March of this year during the routine course of internal checks and balances it came to the attention of the board of directors certain potential irregularities may have occurred concerning our financial status. The board took immediate action to secure the integrity of the organization and initiated an investigative process that included notifying the proper legal authorities. The board is confident that the proper steps have been taken to ensure the future wellbeing of the organization."

The Humane Society believes that at least \$100,000 is missing. That figure could be higher, sources told *Lake Tahoe News*, based on Congero allegedly paying for items at stores and then getting cash back for herself. The organization also has about \$60,000 worth of unpaid veterinary bills, and owes other organizations another \$15,000 or so.

Congero was allegedly using Humane Society funds to pay her own bills. And while at times Congero paid the nonprofit back some money, it was nothing compared to what she took, sources said.

The problem was the board never saw the actual bank statements. Congero would provide summaries. While there had been an outside organization paid to do the bookkeeping, Congero altered the practice to have it so she entered the numbers and categorized them, which she said would save the nonprofit money by spending less on bookkeeping.

The nonprofit has an annual operating budget of \$160,000. Of that, \$50,000 was Congero's annual salary.

Liz Maul, the group's education director, will be let go April 30 because there is no money to pay her. Judy Brown will stay on as the officer manager, and will essentially do the job of three people until the group becomes solvent again.

The Humane Society has had to suspend its spay and neuter program. It wants to get the vet bills paid before resuming that service. The group owns the building it operates out of on Emerald Bay Road, so there is not a threat of being evicted. A loan was recently secured to help with immediate operating expenses.

The board hopes to get its financial house in order and intends to prosecute Congero to the full extent of the law.

This is the organization's 50th anniversary. They are proceeding with a celebration on May 12 from 6-9:30pm at the Hard Rock Café at Harveys. Tickets are \$60 – call 530.542.2857. Other events and activities will go on as well.

How the drought changed California forever

By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News

California's historic five-year drought is officially over, washed away with the relentlessly drenching rains, floods and snowstorms of this winter.

But just as tougher building codes and better emergency planning follow major earthquakes, the brutally dry years from 2012 to 2016 are already leaving a legacy, experts say, changing the way Californians use water for generations

to come.

The drought's legacy includes landmark new laws aimed at limiting farmers from over-pumping groundwater; homeowners removing thousands of suburban lawns; voters approving billions in funding for new reservoirs; and vast expanses of forests dying off across the Sierra Nevada.

Read the whole story

Missing plane search centered northwest of Truckee

By Marcella Corona, Reno Gazette-Journal

Authorities in Sierra County are searching for a missing aircraft that was carrying a married couple from Truckee to Petaluma earlier this week.

Mark Richard and his wife, Brenda, departed at about 4pm Monday from the Truckee Tahoe Airport in a small four-seat Socata TB20 Trinidad with tail No. N28070.

They were scheduled to land at the Petaluma Municipal Airport, but they never arrived, according to the Sierra County Sheriff's Office.

Investigators narrowed the search to an area near Yuba Pass Road, between Webber Lake and Jackson Meadow – about 22 miles northwest of Truckee.

Read the whole story

U.S. needs apartments, but nobody is building them

By Patrick Clark, Bloomberg

Urbanists often lament that developers no longer erect the small apartment buildings that were once a staple of city neighborhoods. Instead, they construct single family homes or large apartment buildings.

There are good reasons to revive this “missing middle,” however: Small buildings are a good way to add density without compromising the character of quiet, single-family districts. They also provide a convenient way for older homeowners to downsize without leaving their neighborhoods.

But the best reason is that smaller apartment buildings are often cheaper for renters.

[Read the whole story](#)

Hot ashes spark garage fire



South Tahoe firefighters on April 19 extinguish a garage fire. Photo/SLTFD

Hot ashes dumped into a trash can inside of a garage erupted into flames Wednesday afternoon.

South Lake Tahoe firefighters were able to keep the fire to the garage of the Tahoe Vista Drive house.

The occupants of the house were able to get out without injury.

Firefighters urge people to dispose of ashes in metal cans.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Huge winter, hostile politics concern scientists

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

The mountain snowpack is fat but funding to unravel what it means for western communities and the environment is thin.

That's the dynamic facing scientists who study climate, snow and water in California and Nevada.

They gathered this month for the fifth Great Basin Climate Forum at the Desert Research Institute in Reno to watch presentations about the drought-busting winter season.

They also talked about how hostility from President Trump and a Republican-controlled Congress could undermine scientific research into climate, water and fire behavior that shape the environment of the Western United States.

Read the whole story

Sewer line, sink hole repair won't be immediate



Repair to the damaged sewer line will take at least a week to fix. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

South Tahoe Public Utility District's board on April 20 is expected to allocate up to \$100,000 for emergency repairs on a ruptured sewer line crossing Tahoe Keys Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe.

Crews from Thomas Haen Company were to arrive Wednesday to begin fixing the problem. It could be more than a week before the work is completed.

When the failure was first detected April 14 the sewer district was able to reroute the discharge so it did not get into the groundwater or soil.

The failure caused a huge sink hole in the road that spans part of both lanes of travel and the median. A detour allows

fluid travel in this South Lake Tahoe neighborhood.

This is a 57-year-old 24-inch asbestos cement pipe that is 16-feet deep. This section is 80-feet long. It was installed before all the houses in the Tahoe Keys were built. The length and severity of the break won't be known until the construction team starts digging.

According to the district, the pipe is believed to be corroded and collapsed because of high hydrogen sulfide.

Portable pumps are pumping sewage out of the manhole and into the wet well, and also directly into the Tahoe Keys force main. From there it goes to STPUD's plant.

Adding to the problem is the ground water is only 3 feet below the surface and the backfill material is "highly deficient."

While the district's board is the only entity needing to sign off on the work, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Board, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and South Lake Tahoe officials have input into the process.

Suit against Placer County regarding Squaw moves forward

By Lake Tahoe News

Both sides in the legal battle involving the proposed development at Squaw Valley are saying a court ruling this week benefits them.

Sierra Watch filed a lawsuit last fall against Placer County contending CEQA, the California Environmental Quality Act, and

the state's open meeting law – the Brown Act – were violated.

“[The] decision is good news for everyone who wants to ensure the integrity of the public process and ultimately to provide reasonable limits on development in Tahoe and to Keep Squaw True,” Isaac Silverman, Sierra Watch attorney, said in a statement. “The Brown Act might not force Placer County to make responsible choices for Tahoe, but it does require that if they are going to make bad choices that harm the lake, they have to do it in the open, in the plain light of a public hearing.”

Clayton Cook, deputy county counsel for Placer County, told *Lake Tahoe News*, “The court's ruling was in response to a motion filed by Placer County, in which the county requested that the court dismiss the claims by Sierra Watch. The court granted part of our request – but denied another part, stating that the issue at hand is a factual dispute that needs to be resolved after discovery has been conducted. This court ruling simply means that some of the allegations will require additional proceedings before the court determines the matter. It does not affect the project in question. Placer County stands by its position that it did not violate the provisions of the Brown Act and we will continue to vigorously defend our actions in court.”

Squaw Valley has been granted approval by all regulatory bodies to overhaul the base area in what will be a \$1 billion, 30-year project that includes 1,493 new bedrooms and a 90,000-square-foot indoor water park.

Sierra Watch alleges that county staff gave documents to the Board of Supervisors less than 72 hours before the public meeting that weren't simultaneously made available to the public.

“The fact is, there was no Brown Act violation. The development agreement was on the agenda, and the DA was

publicly available to anyone who wanted to review it. What is rather striking is that Sierra Watch would attack a voluntary commitment to pay an air quality fee of \$441,000 to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency,” Whit Manley, environmental attorney at Remy Moose Manley, told *Lake Tahoe News*. He is representing Squaw Valley Ski Holdings. “If Sierra Watch’s claim is designed to intimidate the county, we doubt it will work. The county has very able planning and legal staff, and we are sure they will provide a thoughtful response to this misinformed claim.”

Sierra Watch plans to amend its complaint in the next few weeks.

It could be years before the CEQA aspect of the case is resolved.

Most banks run away from marijuana cash

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

The recent gathering at the Sheraton Grand hotel in Sacramento would have been improbable just a few years ago.

Marijuana farmers – clad in plaid shirts and jeans, and looking like, well, farmers – openly assembled for a meeting of the California Growers Association. But the trade group’s agenda topic – about banks refusing cannabis business – still spoke of doors closed and cash transactions made in the shadows.

Convening in the ballroom, CGA members shared stories about

the problems they've had finding banks, credit unions or other institutions willing to take marijuana dollars, make loans to businesses and elevate the legal pot economy from a virtual cash-only industry to one with full access to the financial system.

Now California officials, led by state Treasurer John Chiang, are hosting an on-going series of "Cannabis Banking Working Group" meetings that look to identify policies under which "the cannabis industry may fully avail itself of banking services ... that every other business in California enjoys," Chiang said.

Read the whole story