

Truckee housing project targets 'missing middle'

By Sage Sauerbrey, Moonshine Ink

A new player in the housing scene took a big step forward when the Truckee Planning Commission recommended approval of the hotel-residential development known as Coburn Crossing, with amendments.

The project includes a 114-room Marriott Springhill Suites hotel and 138 residential units, to be built on the 10.35-acre property wedged between Interstate 80 and Donner Pass Road, to the east of the Truckee Cemetery.

The project will be reviewed for approval by the Truckee Town Council on Jan. 24. If approved, Triumph will be moving dirt by June, and plans to have the hotel and apartments open by March 2018, according to Steve Virostek, co-founder and principal of Triumph Partners.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Keys working with primary well off-line

By Kathryn Reed

Tahoe Keys property owners have been asked to scale back their water use while one of the wells is out of commission.

The motor on well No. 3 went out this month. It should be back

in service soon, according to water officials. Pumps generally have a lifespan of seven years. This one has been in service since 1998.

This South Lake Tahoe neighborhood has its own water system that consists of three wells.

“In summer if it went down, we would have major issues and would probably have to borrow from (South Tahoe PUD),” Justin Phillips with the Tahoe Keys Water Department told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This is because so much more water is used in the summer. On an average summer day 1.6 million gallons of water is used in the Keys, which compares to 180,000 gallons in the winter. However, during holiday times like now, 350,000 gallons is the average.

Wells No. 1 and No. 2 also have issues. PCE or tetrachloroethylene has been detected in those wells. The chemical, which is common at dry cleaning plants, was first detected in South Lake Tahoe’s groundwater near the Y in 1989.

Carbon filters can reduce the level to non-detect. This is what the Keys is relying on to provide potable water to customers.

Calif. hopes \$3B trial improves health of neediest

By Anna Gorman, KQED-TV

Riverside County plans to connect former inmates with health clinics and social services. Orange County hopes to get

homeless residents into housing – and help them stay there. Placer County is opening a respite center where homeless patients can go after they leave the hospital.

Those are just some of the pilot projects in a \$3 billion experimental effort officials hope will improve the health of California's most vulnerable populations. The effort is a recognition that improving people's health will take more than just getting them insured.

The state has approved plans in 18 counties intended to reduce unnecessary emergency room visits and hospital stays among these groups.

Read the whole story

Reno-Tahoe airport passenger count increases

By Associated Press

The Reno-Tahoe International Airport is keeping busy this year, with 50,000 more passengers passing through its gates than in 2015.

KTVN-TV reports that nearly 3.6 million passengers traveled through the Reno-Tahoe airport in 2016. Airport officials say an increased number of destinations helped boost passenger numbers.

Currently 125 flights fly out of Reno daily with about 16,000 passengers on board. During the recession, the airport cut 35 percent of its flights but since the economy has been recovering, flights to Atlanta, New York and Guadalajara,

Mexico, have been added.

There are currently eight airlines offering flights to 23 destinations from Reno.

Reno-Tahoe Airport spokesman Brian Kulpin says the airport has added about 1,200 seats to the market in the past year.

Gaming group against Yucca Mountain project

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Nevada will have an advocate in the American Gaming Association against any effort to revive the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository northwest of Las Vegas.

AGA President and CEO Geoff Freeman, in an end-of-the-year press conference call Tuesday, also said he is optimistic that the \$240 billion commercial casino industry would be able to successfully lobby for legal, regulated sports wagering nationwide and that the association would work with the incoming administration to battle against illegal gambling.

Read the whole story

Rooftop solar will make

modest comeback in N. Nevada

By Michelle Rindels, AP

Exactly a year after a controversial rate hike dramatically hampered the number of new rooftop solar installations, Nevada utility regulators voted Thursday to allow about 1,200 customers to install solar systems and get older, more favorable rates when they sell back excess electricity.

The Public Utilities Commission of Nevada voted unanimously to allow a small portion of Northern Nevada residents to sign up for the attractive rates over the next three years. It's a modest but promising step forward after months of acrimonious debate that pit rooftop solar companies against traditional utilities.

"We need to restart a conversation, work together," said commissioner Joe Reynolds, who was appointed chairman by Gov. Brian Sandoval in September. As part of a reshuffling, the prior chairman was moved to a regular commissioner role and the architect of the controversial rate hike was not reappointed to the three-person panel.

"Nevada is at its best when we roll up our sleeves and figure out a way to solve challenges and think outside the box," Reynolds said.

The newly admitted rooftop solar users will account for a small portion of the Sierra Pacific Power Company's estimated 290,000 residential customers. About 2,100 customers in Northern Nevada have already enrolled in the so-called "net metering" program that pays them for their excess energy.

In a lengthy order explaining the policy, Reynolds wrote that allowing new rooftop solar installations at the attractive rates will support the state's goal of diversifying its energy portfolio, and will reduce the average residential customer's

bill by 1 cent a month.

Rooftop solar proponents noted that the decision doesn't apply to the larger customer base in southern Nevada or offer a long-term solution for the solar debate, but praised the decision.

"The commission took a small but important step toward re-aligning rates with the goals that state policymakers and the people of Nevada share: to see more homegrown solar powering their communities and their economy," said Jessica Scott, regional director for the pro-solar nonprofit Vote Solar. "Today's votes signal that Nevada is ready to lead on solar once again."

Regulators said the rate hike last year aimed to end a subsidy that non-solar customers were paying for solar customers. Solar companies disputed that there was a cost-shift, arguing that regulators' calculations didn't factor in environmental and health benefits that solar panels bring to Nevadans.

"It's a difficult issue because you're getting smart folks – well-educated, well-intentioned – who just disagree on basic facts," Reynolds said on Thursday.

Regulators this fall undid one of the most loathed portions of their ruling: applying the new, less-favorable rates to customers who had signed up for net metering under more lucrative conditions. About 32,000 customers with the systems were grandfathered into the better rates this fall, although future customers weren't eligible.

Reynolds' order described the unpopular 2015 ruling as "a promise better left unkept" and said regulators are free to try new approaches to addressing rooftop solar rates. But he also wrote that questions about how to price rooftop solar power are unresolved and it's too early to make broad, binding decisions about net metering policy.

SLT warm room providing more than shelter

By Kathryn Reed

Homelessness has many faces, many circumstances, many reasons. It has only one definition – having no place to live.

It's expected to be in the single digits at 7:30am on Christmas Day in South Lake Tahoe. That's the hour dozens of homeless people will be turned out onto the street until the warm room reopens tonight at 7.

No one grows up with the goal of living on the streets.

A few of the people seeking aid from the warm room have jobs. They just can't pull together the necessary first and last month's rent, plus deposit. The scarcity of rental housing throughout the basin doesn't help.

Some no longer have the capacity to work. Mental and physical issues plague this population.



Steven Gurek is thankful to have the warm room for shelter. Photo/Kathryn Reed

For others like Steven Wayne Gurek, he is biding his time until after the first of January when his next Social Security check arrives and the price of a flight to Hawaii drops. The 62-year-old wants to return to the islands where he has family.

“Right now the warming room is doing me well,” he said last week while sitting at a bus stop a few feet from the shelter. (In the summer he camps near Fallen Leaf Lake.) The sun was shining and he was taking it all in. His next stop was Christmas Cheer to get some food.

Gurek said he used to work for Camp Richardson and Sierra-at-Tahoe doing maintenance. He doesn’t explain what keeps him from working now. His bright blue eyes are those of a man with good memories. His rough, dark skin, though, is weathered, telling a different story.

This is the second year the Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless has operated a warm room. And like last year, the building is on a seasonal lease. The nonprofit would welcome a more permanent facility, even if it still operated seasonally.

In winter 2015-16, the room was open 102 nights, with an average of 18 guests per night. In that time 107 people took shelter for a cumulative 1,820 bed nights.

The 30 cots are available on a first come, first serve basis. In the 10 days the shelter has been open this season people have already had to be turned away.

Some of the same people from last year have shown up this year. There are also new faces.

The men and women sleep in separate areas. Mostly it's men in their 40s and 50s; the women tend to be in their late 20s through 40s. One night three adult women from the same family stayed at the warm room.

Families, though, are not permitted. If applicable, they may be entitled to a voucher for a week's stay in a local hotel. No one under 17 may stay at the warm room. No pets, either.

Everyone gets a Red Cross cot and blanket. Personal belongings are stored in a locked area. Clothing is available, as are travel size toiletries.



The eight cots for women are in what is also the kitchen area.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Many came in soaked when it was raining so hard earlier this month. Some changed into donated clothing. The boot warmers were put into action. This tool is also used before they leave in the morning – a boost of warmth.

In the kitchen area are some basic foods like Cup of Noodles, trail mix, oatmeal, coffee and tea.

This is truly communal living. It's dry and warm. But then there's the snoring, people talking in their sleep, tossing and turning, or getting up to use one of the two bathrooms. Lights are off at 10pm. Lights are on at 6am. There is no TV. No shower. (Vouchers to use the city's recreation center are available and may be redeemed when no children are present.) Games are available, with Scrabble, Chess and Yahtzee the popular ones. Some people read. Others come in and immediately go to sleep.

There is nothing about the warm room that feels like home. It's not supposed to. It really is what it says it is – a warm room.

"We are stricter this year on rules," Nicole Zaborsky, THC board member, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Last year we allowed smoke breaks that were free flowing. Now there is one, which is monitored."



Guests on Christmas Eve were waiting more than 30 minutes for the warm room to open. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Still, it's not just a free place to sleep out of the elements that these men and women receive. Last season 32 social work appointments were scheduled for guests, along with 28 case management follow-up appointments.

This help last year led to five people finding stable housing. One person was even reunited with their mom. Another handful had found a place to live but were not able to keep it.

"Although the warm room will technically close at 7:30am, most mornings we will really be open until 8:30am to offer enrichment programming for our guests," Scott Weavil with the Homeless Coalition told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We plan to have two drug and alcohol groups a week, one Narcotics Anonymous group, one Alcoholics Anonymous group, one litter cleanup, as well as yoga and other enrichment activities. So, most days, services will be offered at the location until 8:30am. The police department suggested that we remain open later, and the stars aligned for us to make that possible."

Only Kindness, a group in Placerville, will be sending people to the warm room starting in January. They can help with securing free cell phones, work on more stable housing and coordinate with county services.

It takes a small army to make the warm room function. One

hundred volunteers were trained last year; they put in 1,600 hours. Another 88 people have been trained this year, with an additional training planned for Jan. 9.

A variety of jobs are available, but the most important one is listening to the guests without judgment.

The guests also have jobs – from helping with cleaning to making the coffee. They understand the efforts being made to make their lives a little more comfortable. Thank yous and gratitude are the norm. They are not taking this warm room for granted. To them, it's a present they get to "unwrap" every night.

—

Notes:

- Address – 2179 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.
- More info is available **online**.
- The Jan. 9 training is from 7-8:30pm at Unity at the Lake. RSVP **online**.

Reid leaves Senate with a legacy that will help Trump

By Erin Kelly and Seth Richardson, USA Today

When President-elect Donald Trump looks to the Senate for confirmation of his Cabinet nominees next year, he'll have outgoing Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid to thank for Democrats' powerlessness to block his choices.

The Nevada Democrat, a fierce Trump opponent who often referred to the president-elect as “a spoiled brat,” took dramatic action in 2013 to end Republicans’ ability to mount a filibuster to derail President Obama’s judicial and Cabinet nominees.

Reid, who was majority leader at the time, used a parliamentary move known as the “nuclear option” to change a nearly 40-year-old Senate rule. The change meant that the Senate now needs only a simple majority of 51 votes – rather than a super-majority of 60 – to proceed to confirmation votes on Cabinet secretaries, agency directors and judges, except for the Supreme Court.

Read the whole story

In Christmas message, pope laments children in war, poverty

By Nicole Winfield, AP

VATICAN CITY – Pope Francis urged Christians to celebrate the birth of Jesus by thinking about the plight of today’s children, bemoaning how some must escape bombs or flee in migrant boats and how others are prevented from being born at all.

Francis celebrated a somber Christmas Eve Mass in a packed St. Peter’s Basilica, processing to the altar behind cardinals draped in golden vestments as the Sistine Chapel choir sang “Gloria” and the church bells rang out across Rome.

Francis has spent much of the year denouncing the Islamic extremist violence that has driven Christians from Mideast communities that date to the time of Christ. He has also demanded Europe in particular do more to welcome refugees, saying Jesus himself was a migrant who deserved more than being born in a manger. And he has called out the wasteful ways of the wealthy when children and the poor die of hunger every day.

In his homily, Francis urged his flock to reflect on how children today aren't always allowed to lie peacefully in a cot, loved by their parents as Jesus was, but rather "suffer the squalid mangers that devour dignity."

Among the indignities, he said, are "hiding underground to escape bombardment, on the pavements of a large city, at the bottom of a boat overladen with immigrants."

"Let us allow ourselves to be challenged by the children who are not allowed to be born, by those who cry because no one satiates their hunger, by those who do have not toys in their hands, but rather weapons," he added.

The Mass late Saturday was the first major event of the Christmas season, followed by Francis' noon Urbi et Orbi (To the city and the world) blessing on Christmas Day.

In another appeal, Francis called for the faithful to not get caught up in the commercialization of Christmas – "when we are concerned for gifts but cold toward those who are marginalized."

Materialism has "taken us hostage this Christmas," he said. "We have to free ourselves of it!"

Truckers rely on pusher to get over Donner Summit

By Tony Bizjak, Sacramento Bee

With drought-defying snowstorms romping through the Sierra on a weekly basis, truckers once again are discovering how tough Interstate 80's Donner Pass can be.

Commercial trucks carrying 80,000-pound loads are losing traction in the snow, officials say, even with tire chains on, getting stuck in heavy summit traffic, blocking lanes and threatening to close the highway.

That, officials say, is where the pusher truck comes in.

Read the whole story