

Liberty begins building solar project



The Luning Solar Project will look similar to this facility. Photo/Provided

Liberty Utilities started construction this week on its first solar project.

It is projected that it will provide 25 percent of the utility's energy requirements when it comes online in December.

The Luning Solar Energy Center will be a 50 megawatt project. Luning is 140 miles southeast of Minden and 80 miles northwest of Tonopah.

In addition to the solar facility, a 120 kV power line approximately 1.6-miles long will be constructed from the solar facility to NV Energy's existing Table Mountain substation. The Luning Project will deliver its generation at this point of interconnection on the NV Energy transmission system in Nevada. NV Energy will then deliver the energy to delivery

points within Liberty Utilities' service territory, which includes the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin, Truckee and Alpine County.

SLT proposing significant project near Ski Run



The triangle area in green represents the area South Lake Tahoe wants to acquire, while the gold section is the “southwest corner” property at Ski Run and Highway 50. The purple section is California Tahoe Conservancy land. Map provide by South Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Bulldozing and starting over is what many people would like to do with a majority of parcels in South Lake Tahoe.

One-by-one the California Tahoe Conservancy is doing this. The board in March will have a say in whether that happens to the Knights Inn that fronts Highway 50 at the corner of Herbert Avenue.

First, though, it will be the South Lake Tahoe City Council deciding if it wants to buy the property. It is adjacent to what is loosely known as the “southwest corner” parcel at Highway 50 and Ski Run Boulevard.

The goal is to combine the two parcels, which together is about 6 acres, into one development plan.

The city owns the parcel at Ski Run, having bought it from the now defunct Redevelopment Agency for \$800,000. It has been in escrow for more than a year with Halferty Development Company out of Sacramento for \$1.3 million.



Knights Inn may be razed, including Mo’s Place. The recently paved sidewalks will stay intact. Photo/LTN

The hotel site, which also includes a conference center on Lloyd Avenue as well as owner Pradip Patel’s residence on that street, has been appraised at \$4.5 million. On Feb. 16 the council will be asked to vote to buy it for \$6 million. The added costs account for the value of the commodities, which include 110 hotel units (which bring in approximately \$100,000

year in transit occupancy tax), about 5,000-square-feet of commercial floor area, and a substantial amount of coverage.

The bulk of the money to buy the property is projected to come from the CTC, with the city contributing the money from the sale of the southwest corner and probably a couple hundred thousand dollars. Which fund that comes out of the council will decide.

Assuming the CTC board green lights the idea, the city would spend the summer doing environmental analysis. The CTC board would then make the final decision at its October meeting. The developer and city would spend next fall-winter getting permits, and construction could begin in May 2017.

"If it all falls together, it will be a beautiful entryway. It will be remarkable," City Councilman Austin Sass told *Lake Tahoe News*. "If it happens, it will be very exciting for our town."

Sass with Councilman Hal Cole make up the city's real property subcommittee, which has been negotiating the deal along with city staff.

While the specific tenants are not known, not even the types of businesses are being disclosed. What city officials would say is the retail won't be T-shirt shops or a drug store. They said businesses not currently operating here are who the developer is wooing. The city as landowner has negotiated a deal so that it has final say over what type of business goes in.

It will be a mini-village of sorts with varied retail, that will be walkable, aesthetically appealing, and potentially have an educational component regarding the environment.



The “southwest corner” lot comes with 88 parking spaces in the adjacent garage that otherwise is controlled by Lake Tahoe Vacation Resort. Photo/LTN

The developer already bought 12,000-square-feet of CFA from the city for the southwest corner. They will need more to do the project they have in mind. Between the two parcels three buildings may be constructed. Depending on the tenant(s) it could be a build-to-suit scenario. The southwest corner can have a maximum height of 56 feet, and the hotel property can go up to 44 feet.

It’s too soon to decide if a long-term lease will be entered into or if one day the city might sell the land to the developer or another entity.

The entrance Sass referenced would be at the corner of Ski Run and Highway 50. On the hotel property a water feature is planned to capture the natural flow of the runoff that comes down from the mountain side (and is the reason the hotel for years has had flooding issues), and then have it go under the highway to the lake. Right now it flows that way without ever being treated.

This area was once a stream environmental zone.

The Conservancy funds these sorts of endeavors when there is a significant environmental gain. City officials estimate 8,000 pounds of sediment could be prevented from reaching the lake with the proper erosion control measures put into place. This in turn would meet more than 20 percent of the city's sediment reduction goals that Lahontan Water Quality Control Board has mandated for the five-year period starting this year.

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Notes:

- The City Council meets Feb. 16 at 9am at Lake Tahoe Airport.

Nev. makes strides in reducing number of uninsured children

By Jackie Valley, Las Vegas Sun

The number of Nevada children without health insurance keeps dropping, especially among such historically hard-to-reach populations as minorities and lower-income residents, according to a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation study released Thursday.

The number of uninsured Nevada children dropped to 10 percent in 2014 from 14.4 percent in 2013 – the largest percentage decline among all states and the District of Columbia. That means 30,758 Nevada children gained health insurance during

that one-year period.

While Nevada posted a number of significant gains, 10 percent of Nevada children remain uninsured – leading to a 48th ranking among all states and the District of Columbia. In 2013, Nevada had the highest rate of uninsured children in the nation.

Read the whole story

Feinstein tries again with California water bill

By Michael Doyle, McClatchy Washington Bureau

Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein on Wednesday relaunched a big California water bill, in what might be cast as the triumph of hope over experience.

Unveiling her third proposal in the past two years for ways to divide California's water supply among many competing interests, Feinstein packaged her latest 184-page measure as a reasonable compromise that draws the best from past Capitol Hill efforts.

The bill introduced Wednesday largely tracks draft language Feinstein made public in January. It eases limits on water transfers south of the Delta, but does not mandate specific pumping levels. It authorizes \$1.3 billion for desalination, water recycling, storage and grants. It compels completion of feasibility studies for storage projects like Temperance Flat on the San Joaquin River.

Read the whole story

Obama proposes new approaches to Western water shortages

By Carolyn Lochhead, San Francisco Chronicle

WASHINGTON — Spurning dams for research in water technology, President Obama laid out a striking contrast Tuesday to the strategies adopted by California lawmakers in both parties on how to remedy Western water shortages.

In a final budget plan that was dead even before its arrival on Capitol Hill, the administration's vision of investing \$269 million in research on water desalination, recycling and efficiency will find little traction in the Republican-controlled Congress.

But it does lay out an alternative to the dams, water tunnels and other giant building projects that Gov. Jerry Brown, Democratic Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, and Central Valley House Republicans have embraced to varying degrees.

Read the whole story

Driverless cars struggle in the snow

By Keith Naughton, BloombergNews

In Jokkmokk, a tiny hamlet just north of the Arctic Circle in Sweden, where temperatures can dip to 50 below, Volvo Cars' self-driving XC90 sport-utility vehicle met its match: frozen flakes that caked on radar sensors essential to reading the road. Suddenly, the SUV was blind.

"It's really difficult, especially when you have the snow smoke from the car in front," said Marcus Rothoff, director of Volvo's autonomous-driving program. "A bit of ice, you can manage. But when it starts building up, you just lose functionality."

After moving the sensors around to various spots on the front, Volvo engineers finally found a solution. Next year, when Swedish drivers take their hands off the wheel of leased XC90s in the world's first public test of autonomous technology, the radar will be nestled behind the windshield, where wipers can clear the ice and snow.

Read the whole story

Report: Nev. scores poorly on tobacco measures

By Noah Glick, KUNR

Let's start with the negatives. Nevada got an F in tobacco

taxes, cessation services and prevention funding.

“We’re only spending about six percent of what the CDC recommends we spend to prevent youth from starting to smoke and help adults quit. Only North Dakota, only one state, received an A.”

That’s Frankie Vigil, executive director of the American Lung Association of Nevada. She says there is room for improvement, but Nevada is in line with much of the nation.

Read the whole story

Public gets answers to loop road questions

By Kathryn Reed

By August the Tahoe Transportation District expects to have the necessary approvals from the various entities to go forward with the loop road on the South Shore.

What is expected to be a \$75 million construction project would reroute Highway 50 at about Pioneer Trail on the east, go behind Harrah’s-MontBleu and come out at a roundabout at Lake Parkway. The current highway then becomes a street to be maintained by South Lake Tahoe and Douglas County.

About 80 people attended a meeting Feb. 10 at South Tahoe Middle School, with just about that many questions asked of the three-member panel. Answering the questions were Carl Hasty, district manager of the Tahoe Transportation District; Russ Nygaard with TTD; and Mark Rayback, project engineer with Wood Rodgers.

Some of the questions from the public and the answers:

Q: *Where will the money come from to pay for the construction?*

A: Mostly the federal government. It is too soon know what percentage will come from any one source. No construction dollars have been secured. The project, per federal law, cannot begin until it is fully funded.

Q: *Where has the money to date come from?*

A: Primarily the federal government, with some from Nevada Public Lands. About \$3 million has been spent so far.

Q: *Will South Lake Tahoe taxpayers foot any of the bills?*

A: Not for the construction.

Q: *The millions of dollars the project is expected to cost – what will that buy? In other words, will it pay for all of the improvements presented in the pictures at the various meetings or will it just pay for land acquisition, relocation of residents/businesses, the highway and the overpass?*

A: It pays for almost everything, including relocation of utilities if need be. There is some question as to whether **South Tahoe Public Utility District's \$10 million** price tag to do so was realistic. Landscaping – but not the maintenance of it – is covered, as is narrowing the current highway to one lane in each direction. It pays for the overpass, but not that maintenance. The structure will be Caltrans' obligation, while snow removal could fall to State Parks.

Q: *Why put in a roundabout instead of a light at the east side?*

A: There will be better movement and lower speeds, plus it allows for creative landscaping.

Q: *How much low-income housing will be built?*

A: It depends on the alternative that is selected. Between 65 and 200 deed restricted units could be built. Where they are built is still to be decided. It does not have to be at that end of town. Between 47 and 90 residents could be displaced. (The discrepancy between numbers was not explained.) Anyone over age 18 is eligible for relocation assistance. The federal Uniform Act is what TTD must follow in regards to relocation assistance. It is estimated to cost \$2 million for the relocation aspect of the project.

Q: Will there be a left turn lane out of Tahoe Meadows?

A: No, the project doesn't go that far west.

Q: How many businesses will be impacted in South Lake Tahoe and Douglas County?

A: Three to six in the city, zero in the county.

Q: What is the current assessed value of the properties that will be affected?

A: The appraisal has not been done.

Q: How does the project affect the tax base?

A: More taxes should be collected based on the property values being higher.

Q: Caltrans stats show traffic has declined in the state line area in the last two decades, so why do this project?

A: Counts at Echo Summit are up, so the vehicles are here; they are just finding other routes near state line like Pioneer Trail. (This project will not enhance Pioneer Trail.)

Q: Could Caltrans use eminent domain and bypass the wishes of South Lake Tahoe?

A: Yes.

Q: *What are the environmental concerns?*

A: Noise is likely No. 1. All of the TRPA thresholds like air and water quality, scenic; plus green house gases are big for California. Noise could be mitigated with a sound wall, using a special pavement, or with open space and berms.

Q: *How will the fire departments be impacted?*

A: They won't be.

Q: *Will the public have a say in the design?*

A: Yes.

Q: *Why will there be a light behind Harrah's and will this slow down traffic?*

A: Future projections are that traffic flows warrant a light there; it will not impede flow.

Q: *Why not make the entire casino corridor open only to pedestrians?*

A: The city and county still could, but that suggestion never rose to the level to be studied in the environmental documents.

Q: *Why not use Heavenly Way or go behind Harveys-Hard Rock?*

A: Both are not feasible when it comes to design and rights-of-way, number of driveways, and because of existing stormwater detention basins.

Q: *Why not take the project to the voters?*

A: Not TTD's decision; it would be highly unusual.

Q: *Can the project go forward without South Lake Tahoe's approval?*

A: No.

Q: *What about a tunnel?*

A: It was looked at and is not feasible.

Q: *What about snow removal?*

A: It will likely be pushed farther west into a middle lane and then disposed of as it is today.

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Notes:

- The videotape of Wednesday's meeting will be edited and then made available on the **TTD's website** in what representatives hope will be no more than a week.
- The environmental impact report will be released this quarter; with people having 60 days to comment on it. The final document will be out the second quarter of the year.
- Agencies needing to sign off on either the environmental documents, permits, rights-of-way, and/or transfer of road ownership include: Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Advisory Planning Commission and Governing Board, Tahoe Transportation District board, South Lake Tahoe City Council, Douglas County Commission, Federal Highway Administration, Caltrans and Nevada Department of Transportation.

Nevada could lose its first-

in-the-West caucus

By Seth A. Richardson, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada's first-in-the-West status could be in jeopardy barring an abnormally high turnout compared with previous years, according to national reports and in-state experts.

Several reports have stated the theory recently, especially regarding the Republican caucus and a potential move to another state. Turnout for the Republican caucuses was below 45,000 in both 2008 and 2012 compared with about 120,000 for the Democrats in 2008, the last time they had a competitive race.

Republican National Committee spokeswoman Sara Sendek said any decision about the caucuses is far from finalized.

Read the whole story

Calif. drought adds \$2 billion in electricity costs

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

It's one of the lesser-known costs of California's drought: the drying-up of the state's normally abundant cheap hydroelectric power.

A hydro shortage has raised California's electricity costs by a combined \$2 billion the past four years, according to a report released Tuesday by the Pacific Institute, a water policy think tank based in Oakland. In addition, the institute

said the drought has contributed to climate change: California's fossil-fuel power plants have increased greenhouse gas emissions by 10 percent to make up for the hydro shortage.

The financial impact on individual consumers hasn't been huge.

Read the whole story