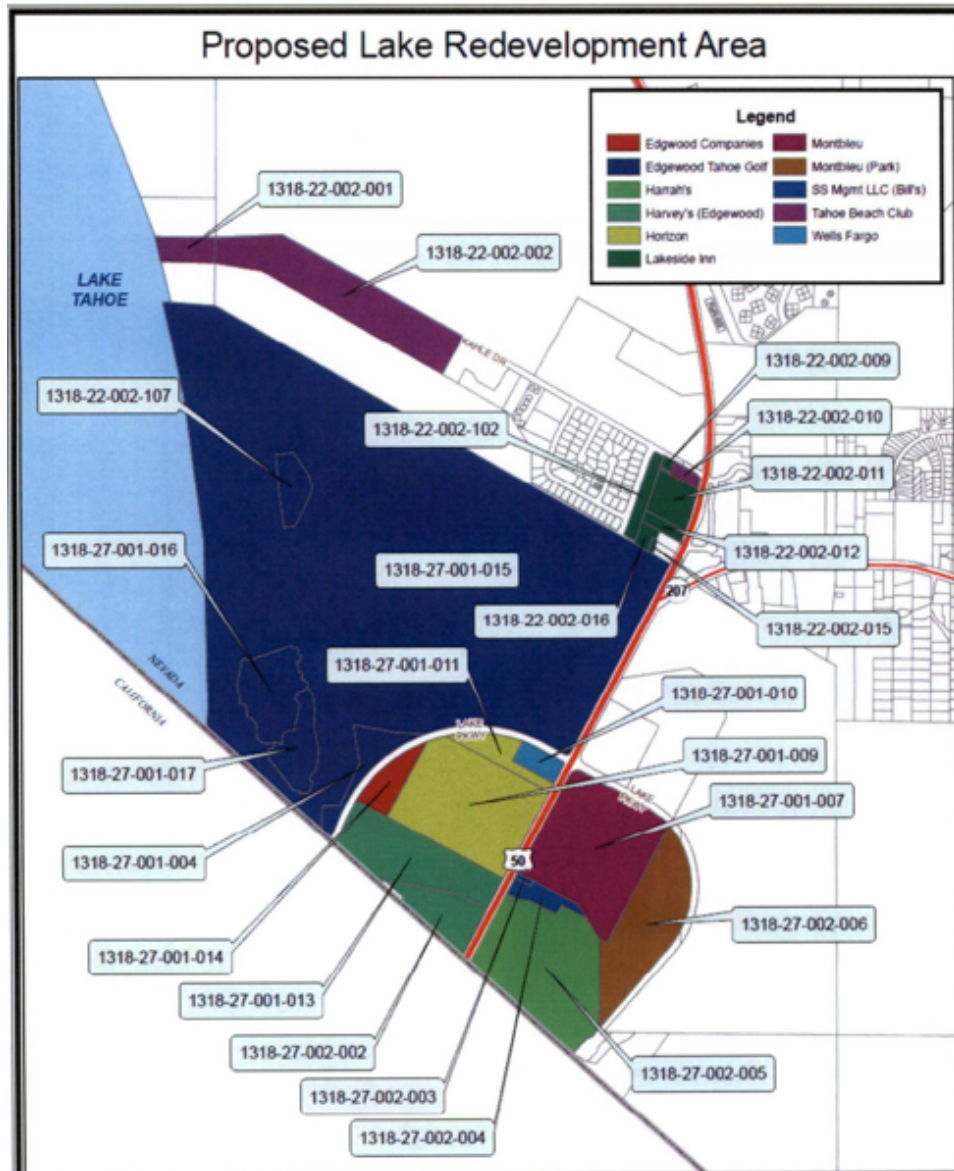


Douglas creates Stateline redevelopment area



Source: *Douglas County*

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – In an attempt to encourage investment in the Stateline area, Douglas County commissioners on Thursday unanimously agreed to create a redevelopment agency.

It essentially will encompass the casino core east to Kahle Drive. From Lake Park Way only the property on the north side

of Highway 50 to Kahle is included.

Mike Bradford was the only person from the public to comment. Representing the South Tahoe Alliance of Resorts, he told the board the redevelopment agency will help with implementing aspects of the **South Shore Vision Plan**. In particular he mentioned the loop road and creation of a permanent entertainment venue.

Redevelopment agencies are a product of the state, with certain criteria needing to be met to create such an entity. One of those is determining that there is blight.

The main issue that was brought up at the Jan. 21 meeting was how tax increment can impact other entities that receive property tax distribution. Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District was singled out.

Redevelopment agencies receive their funding from what is called tax increment. When the assessed value of a property goes up – aka tax increment – all that money stays with the redevelopment agency. This means public agencies will not get those dollars.

Bradford assured the board and fire district that “public safety will not be compromised.”

Estimates are the redevelopment agency through the tax increment would collect \$47.2 million in 30 years.

The redevelopment agency, of which the commissioners are the board of directors, will also have the power of eminent domain.

The documents say, “The agency is authorized to demolish and clear buildings, structures and other improvements from any real property acquired in the redevelopment area as necessary to carry out the purposes of this plan.”

The second reading to create the agency will occur in

February.

California did away with redevelopment agencies effective in 2012, which forced South Lake Tahoe to dissolve its agency and sell off property it owned.

Judge: Caesars reorganization not a given

By Jacqueline Palank, Wall Street Journal

CHICAGO—Continued sparring over an investigation into dealings between Caesars Entertainment Corp. and its bankrupt operating unit could torpedo the unit's restructuring, a bankruptcy judge suggested Wednesday.

Judge A. Benjamin Goldgar of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Chicago on Wednesday warned Caesars, its bankrupt unit and others fighting over which details of the investigation have to be made public. If the fight isn't resolved, "then this case is going to take rather a different turn from the one that I imagine the debtor and its parent and its affiliates would like to see," he said.

Rather than allowing the unit's current management to remain in charge, Judge Goldgar listed a number of other paths the Caesar unit's chapter 11 case could take.

Read the whole story

Brown urges steps to end 'zigzag of spend-cut-spend'

By John Myers, Los Angeles Times

In a short speech with a long view of California, Gov. Jerry Brown used his State of the State address to challenge lawmakers to better balance the cyclical nature of success and setback that has dominated state government for the better part of two decades.

"The challenge is to solve today's problems without making those of tomorrow even worse," the governor said in his annual speech delivered from the Assembly chamber Thursday.

Brown, interrupted by occasional applause from legislators, touched on themes that included California's drought and the challenges of income inequality and terrorism.

Read the whole story

Former Olympic downhill champ Bill Johnson dies at 55



In this Feb. 16, 1984, photo, Bill Johnson smiles after he won the gold medal in men's downhill at the Winter Olympics on Mt. Bjelansnica near Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Photo/AP

By Eric Willemssen, AP

Bill Johnson, the brash American who became the first U.S. skier to win an Olympic downhill title, died after a long illness, the U.S. ski team said Friday. He was 55.

Megan Harrod, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Alpine team, said Johnson died Thursday at an assisted living facility in Gresham, Ore.

Johnson's health had been on the decline for several years after a series of strokes.

Johnson won the downhill at the 1984 Sarajevo Olympics, the first American to capture gold in Alpine skiing's marquee event. He was also the first American male to win an Olympic

gold in any Alpine event.

He became an iconic figure to many Americans by predicting he would win Olympic gold.

"They related to Billy – that brash, throw-it-in-your-face type attitude," Phil Mahre, who won the Olympic slalom in 1984, said in 2012. "When you tell people you're going to go do something and then you go out and back it up like in Sarajevo, it's pretty impressive."

Johnson tried to make a comeback ahead of the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics at the age of 40, but crashed in a downhill training run in 2001 at the U.S. championships at the Big Mountain near Whitefish, Mont. He sustained a traumatic brain injury that erased nearly a decade of memories. He had to learn how to walk, talk and eat again.

Johnson made steady improvement over the years, even returning to the slopes for recreation. But his health deteriorated again because of strokes, and he spent his last years in the assisted living center near Portland.

"Bill was an unbelievable fighter since his injury. He went through a lot. It's sad," Olympic super-G silver medalist Andrew Weibrecht said Friday. "He was the guy that really jump-started American downhill racing. Nothing had really happened much up until '84 when Bill came and had that fantastic run in Sarajevo and that same year he won Wengen.

"He really paved the way for guys like Tommy Moe, A.J. Kitt and Kyle Rasmussen to realize that it's possible. In turn these guys paved the way for our generation," Weibrecht said after finishing second in a World Cup super-G in Kitzbuehel.

Weibrecht's teammate Steven Nyman also paid tribute to Johnson.

"He didn't care what anyone said, he did it his way. And he

did really good,” Nyman said. “There was a couple of years where he was really good and he kind of paved the way for us. For some reason, Americans have done well in Olympic downhills, with him, Bode (Miller) and Tommy Moe. Hopefully I can follow in his tracks.”

Nyman, who met Johnson a few times, recalled how he and teammate Marco Sullivan sent Johnson a short video to congratulate him on his birthday last spring.

“He sent us a message back and really appreciated it. It meant something,” Nyman said.

“It’s really sad,” Lindsey Vonn, winner of the 2010 women’s Olympic downhill title, said Friday. “He’s had a rough couple of years and it’s been sad to watch him deteriorate like that. But you know when you’re in a state like that I think it’s a blessing sometimes. He was an incredible legend in our sport so I just hope he rests in peace and my condolences to his family.”

Johnson, who was born in Los Angeles, grew up racing at Bogus Basin, Idaho, and Mt. Hood, Ore.

Caught stealing cars as a teenager, the judge gave him a choice: Attend ski school or head to jail. So he went to Mission Ridge Ski Academy in Washington, where he developed his talent.

Johnson established himself on the global scene when he won the Lauberhorn downhill in Wengen, Switzerland, in 1984 in his second year on the World Cup circuit.

A month later, Johnson went to Sarajevo and cockily predicted that he would win, annoying his European rivals. He came through, beating silver medalist Peter Mueller of Switzerland by 0.27 seconds.

“What he did that day was amazing at the time,” said Bill

Marolt, former president and CEO of the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association. "In retrospect, it's still amazing."

Johnson won twice more on the World Cup circuit in 1984 in Aspen and Whistler, but never stepped on the podium again. He went through knee and back injuries that curtailed his career and prevented him from defending his title at the 1988 Calgary Olympics.

"He was just a legend," American speed racer Travis Ganong said. "He used to be a pioneer for American downhill skiing. ... He was an amazing skier and was a legend of the sport. He will be dearly missed for sure."

Vonn and Tommy Moe are the only other American skiers to win Olympic gold in downhill.

Vonn, who was competing in downhill training Friday ahead of a World Cup race in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, said Johnson was a trailblazer for American downhillers.

"He was definitely a pioneer – first American to win an Olympic downhill gold medal," Vonn said. "So for sure, an inspiration and for Americans definitely a legend in the sport."

AP sports writer Andrew Dampf in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, contributed to this report.

Sierra Colina project in Stateline resurrected

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Similar, yet different. That's one way to describe what the latest version of the Sierra Colina subdivision in Stateline looks like.

"The original Sierra Colina project was going to be the premier project in the entire Lake Tahoe Basin. It's unfortunate it ended up in litigation. Everyone lost," Douglas County Commissioner Nancy McDermid said.

She singled out how the previous project included nine moderate-income deed restricted single-family residences that would have been ideal for local workers.

The property borders Lake Village, Highway 50 and the commercial area with Sushi Pier and Azul restaurants. Today it is vacant land.

Commissioners on Jan. 21 unanimously agreed to subdivide the 18-acre parcel into 47 parcels on which 13 single-family residences and 34 duplexes will be built. They will be smaller units – the smallest being 1,546-square-feet – than what was proposed more than six years ago. All will be built to LEED standards. There will also be a homeowners' recreation building and trails. The road through the development will be private.

"We are gratified with the votes cast by the Douglas County Board of Commissioners (Thursday) in support of the Sierra Colina project. Because the county approval process is still ongoing, out of respect for that process, we reserve further comment until it is completed," Gail Jaquish told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Jaquish with her husband, Steve Kenninger, who live locally, acquired the property in 2005 in a foreclosure sale. Four years later they obtained approval from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to build 50 units.

Soon thereafter the League to Save Lake Tahoe filed a lawsuit

that ultimately derailed the project. The **appellate court in 2012** sided with the environmental group, which had challenged TRPA over the coverage issues for the Sierra Colina project. Coverage is a TRPA creation dictating how much land can be paved in order to contend with erosion issues.

Since that decision came out Jaquish and Kenninger have been deciding how to go forward. Neither attended this week's meeting.

The six members of the public who spoke at Thursday's meeting were all in favor of the project. Many pointed out how the couple has put more time and money into this project when someone less determined would have walked away.

The project will be built in four phases. The first will be to put the utilities underground.

Before the second phase begins improvements to the intersection of Lake Village Drive and Highway 50 will be made. These include left and right turn lanes onto the highway, and an accelerator lane on the highway for those turning left.

Nichols leaves Douglas with 6 month's pay

By Kathryn Reed

Jim Nichols is walking away from his job as Douglas County manager with a check for more than \$115,000 – the equivalent of six month's pay, plus sick and vacation pay.

At the Jan. 21 meeting it was stressed that Nichols neither

resigned nor was he fired. Instead it was a mutual agreement between Nichols and the commissioners for him to leave his position after 16 months on the job because there was a belief he could not longer be effective.



Jim Nichols

Had he been let go by the board, Nichols' contract stated he would have been given two month's notice, at which time he would have remained on the job, and then been entitled to six month's pay.

He practically got that – except he didn't have to work those two months. Nichols has not been on the job since Jan. 12, but is on the payroll through Jan. 29.

There was no discussion about the payout, just the vote.

A few letters opposing the deal were submitted, but no one from the public spoke.

Discussion then ensued about what happens next.

Commissioners on a 4-1 vote agreed to ask Larry Werner to be the interim county manager. Commissioner Steve Thaler said no. He preferred to seek an interim from within the county. It is the commission's desire Werner would work for a year, giving the county time to find someone suitable for the indefinite future.

Werner was the interim county manager before Nichols was hired. At that time he made \$12,500/month.

The board then voted to have Mimi Moss, community development director, be acting county manager until a long-term interim is selected. She has filled in before as county manager.

Christine Vuletich, who is the assistant county manager, was bypassed for the short-term chief spot because she is tasked with putting together the next fiscal budget.

It was pointed out that with three of the commissioners' being up for re-election this year it may make it difficult to easily find a county manager. Plus, many residents and employees are less than satisfied with how the current board is doing business, so the semblance of dysfunction could be a turn off.

FAA approves ski-video drones at Tahoe

By Bart Jansen, USA Today

Commercial drones are about to get a lot closer to the action.

The drone startup Cape Productions follows skiers down the slopes with remote-controlled aircraft to record video of their runs. The San Francisco company announced Wednesday that the Federal Aviation Administration gave it approval to fly hundreds of feet closer to people than previously allowed.

The FAA typically requires commercial drones to stay at least 500 feet away from people who aren't associated with the flight, as a safety precaution. The exception for years has been for aerial photography as part of a closed movie set because the participants are expected to know the risks.

The company will initially offer the service in the U.S. at Squaw Valley and Homewood Mountain Resort, where it has been testing its operation.

[Read the whole story](#)

Calif. has ‘a shot out of the drought’ if El Niño rain persists

By Joseph Serna, Los Angeles Times

With a couple of weeks of rain and snow behind them and more on the horizon for the Sierra Nevada in Northern California, state water officials expressed cautious hope that this El Niño season could lift California out of its historic drought.

“The recent rains have put us on a good trajectory to perhaps have a shot out of the drought if it were to continue at the current rate,” said Doug Carlson, a spokesman with the California Department of Water Resources.

As of Wednesday, the northern Sierra Nevada had received 114 percent of the average rainfall typical during strong El Niño years, while the central Sierra Nevada in the San Joaquin basin was doing even better, having received 122 percent of average rainfall typical during big El Niño years.

[Read the whole story](#)

Study: Snow soaks up toxic air pollutants

By Jacqueline Howard, *Huffington Post*

A team of scientists recently revealed that snow in urban areas can absorb the same toxic and carcinogenic pollutants that come from car exhaust. The interaction of pollutants with cold elements and freezing temperatures in snow might even cause the release of new compounds, according to Parisa Ariya, professor of chemistry and atmospheric sciences at McGill University in Canada, who led the research.

“Snow flakes are ice particles with various types of surfaces, including several active sites, that can absorb various gaseous or particulate pollutants,” she told the *Huffington Post*. “As a mother who is an atmospheric physical chemist, I definitely do not suggest my young kids to eat snow in urban areas in general.”

The researchers analyzed how snow interacts with exhaust-derived particles and pollutants by putting both snow and exhaust fumes in a chamber. After examining the chemical reactions that took place, the researchers discovered that snow was efficient at removing pollutant particles from the air.

Read the whole story

Federal money to help reduce Tahoe's fire risk

The latest round of funding through the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act includes more than \$3 million for projects to help reduce wildfire risk in Lake Tahoe communities.

Projects include:

- U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit: \$1.094 million to reduce hazardous fuels on 2,300 acres between Crystal Bay and Incline Village, south to Spooner Summit and Zephyr Cove, and another \$470,000 to prepare a plan to remove hazardous fuels from urban lots it manages.
- Lake Valley Fire Protection District: \$290,490 to reduce hazardous fuels on 93 acres in its service area.
- Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District: \$308,760 to reduce hazardous fuels on up to 100 acres around Kingsbury Grade communities so firefighters can more safely protect life, property, and the environment in the event of a wildland fire.
- Nevada: \$120,500 to reduce hazardous fuels on approximately 70 acres of urban lots and open space in communities on the East Shore.
- California State Parks: \$261,940 to reduce hazardous fuels on 107 acres and restore and improve forest and watershed resources at D.L. Bliss State Park.
- North Tahoe and Meeks Bay fire protection districts: \$450,000 to reduce hazardous fuels on up to 514 acres of private and local government-owned land in Kings Beach, Tahoe Vista, Carnelian Bay, and Meeks Bay. The two fire protection districts will also host educational workshops with local students and community members about the importance of fuel reduction projects

and creating fire adapted communities.

- North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District: \$200,000 to reduce hazardous fuels on up to 544 acres of local government owned land in Incline Village. The fire protection district will also host educational workshops for community members to learn more about the importance of fuel reduction projects and creating fire adapted communities.