

Roads-paths near STMS being scrutinized



Garrett Villanueva, right, marks his trail ideas as Ben Fish with Design Workshop looks on Nov. 19.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Reducing the width of travel lanes to create bike or multi-use paths around South Tahoe Middle School was a reoccurring theme during a workshop Wednesday night.

Statistics show from 2008-12 in a two-mile radius of STMS there have been 257 collisions, of which 23 involved pedestrians and 37 were cyclists. There were four fatalities, 21 involved severe injuries, 75 visible injuries and 155 complained of injuries.

Improving street crossings, and creating better bike paths and sidewalks could reduce those numbers, advocates believe.

Another problem is there are many gaps in the connections in

and around the middle school. The goal is to fill those in and make what exists better.

Lake Tahoe Sustainability Collaborative was awarded a \$153,625 On Our Way grant from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to look at how bike and pedestrian connections around STMS could be improved. The Community Mobility Group, a subgroup of the collaborative, on Nov. 19 presented alternatives to the more than 20 people who attended the workshop.

The first workshop was in October.

It was pointed out how most roads adjacent to a school have signs altering drives to the facility. Not so for STMS on either Highway 50 or Al Tahoe Boulevard. And neither requires motorists to slow to 25 mph when students are present.

Signage is the minimum the group is proposing.

To figure out what improvements to make the group has conducted community, STMS parent and student surveys, and two workshops. Traffic studies and counts have been done. Stakeholders have been consulted.

The east-west connection through Bijou Community Park is an idea that came earlier from the public.

More than 20 poster boards were scattered about the STMS multipurpose room outlining statistics and possibilities. They delved into the intersections of Al Tahoe and Highway 50, Al Tahoe and Johnson Boulevard, Lyons and 50, and Rufus Allen Boulevard and 50.

Class 1 bike trails, cycle tracks, green painting and bike lanes are being looked into.

Organizers and those stakeholders will pick a preferred alternative from all the data that has been collected. It will then be 30 percent engineered – close to shovel ready so grants could be secured for implementation.

Some of the thoughts, ideas and concerns on Wednesday included:

- Putting a diagonal crosswalk at Lyons Avenue and Highway 50;
- Wondering if user trails will go away;
- Desiring select trees to be cut to allow more sun on paths;
- Elevating a trail through Bijou Meadow instead of paving it;
- A crosswalk on Al Tahoe Boulevard to get to the future bike park;
- Shared cart path for golfers-walkers-cyclists at Bijou Golf Course, and add signs.

A long-term vision of the group is to either improve the current Trout Creek Highway 50 underpass or build a new underpass to the south.

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Notes:

- More info about the Lake Tahoe Sustainability Collaborative Community Mobility group may be found online.

Skip Black Friday to get better deals

By Shelly Banjo, Wall Street Journal

When it comes to holiday shopping, it pays to track what retailers do, not what they say.

For all the hype, Black Friday isn't the day to find the best deals, according to new data from Adobe Systems Inc., which has collected information on one trillion visits to 4,500 retailing websites since 2008.

Instead, retailers' biggest price cuts last year came on the Monday before Thanksgiving, and shoppers who bought items on Thanksgiving Day snapped up the season's lowest prices, according to Adobe.

The weeks before the Black Friday weekend offered better deals than the weeks leading up to Christmas.

What's more, those who shopped on Black Friday were more likely to find items out of stock.

Read the whole story

Ticket scofflaws owe Calif. \$10.2 billion

By Teri Sforz, Orange County Register

In the next year, about 20 percent of drivers will be convicted of speeding, rolling through stop signs or failing to stop at red lights, while another 8 percent will likely get off with a warning, and many more will be ticketed for parking illegally, having expired tags or some other bit of minor motor malfeasance.

Drivers will pay millions in fines and those millions may mingle in a kitty with fines and restitution paid by criminals. But California's courts and counties are doing a spotty job of collecting this money, and the Legislative

Analyst's Office isn't even sure it's being counted correctly.

California's crooks and scofflaws – including drivers who haven't paid off tickets – owe, according to the LAO, \$10.2 billion in court-ordered fines and fees.

The more sobering news, perhaps, is not necessarily that officials have collected only a fraction of the total – a comparably wee \$1.8 billion – but that it's hard to know precisely how much they've collected, due to “incomplete and inconsistent reporting ... minimal data ... miscalculation of performance measures ... and a lack of evaluation,” the LAO said.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe beach brouhaha not resolved

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe officials and operators of the Beach Retreat & Lodge agreed to sit down to figure out solutions to what has become a contentious issue regarding access to the beach.

This centrally located lakefront hotel has changed general managers multiple times since Urbana Realty Advisors became owners a few years ago. But Brandon Reed (no relation to this reporter) told *Lake Tahoe News* he is here to stay and wants to build relationships.

He was put on the hot seat Nov. 18 during the South Lake Tahoe

City Council meeting.

Issues include when the public has access to the beach, to what areas, and if the 18 public parking spaces really are available.

Councilwoman Brooke Laine shared her experience this summer of being told by hotel staff there was no parking by the pier only to make her way back there to find out they were lying. She said antics like that are fueling distrust. She had been honest by telling the worker she was not a guest of the hotel.

Reed said when the construction is done in the coming months on the conference center that parking will be easy to come by. The city would like stenciled markings to indicate the spots are public. That is still up in the air.

Reed added, "We have no intention of disputing that the public has access to the beach."

The problem is for years many people believed this whole stretch of sand was public. In reality it is a private beach with public access. All of that is based on a 1980's court decision. And the public agency with control is the State Lands Commission.

The city wants better signage to explain to the public where they are allowed to go and when.

Leniency during the Fourth of July and Labor Day fireworks was also requested. This is because part of the beach is off limits to the public after dark.

In return, Reed wants people to be respectful when weddings are going on.

The public, though, doesn't want the prime part of the beach cordoned off all day for a one-hour event.

Peggy Bourland submitted 900 signatures on a petition to allow

the public the right to access the beach.

It was pointed out how the city picks up trash from the beach, and how U.S. Bank and Deb Howard and Co. have adopted it for cleanup after fireworks shows.

City Attorney Tom Watson during his presentation said the point of the dialog was “to reduce disputes rather than exacerbate them.”

What the two sides come up with, and how the public and hotel treat each other will determine if Watson’s wishes come true.

In other news:

- Scott Blasser, president of the South Lake Tahoe Firefighters Association, told the council one-third of the department is looking for a new job because their compensation is not adequate. However, the department just agreed to a 9 percent raise over three years, and was the only department to get a 2 percent raise under the former city manager because they signed the agreement first.
- Outgoing Councilwoman Brooke Laine thanked her colleagues, staff and the public for their support these last two years.

Nev. legislators to tackle host of gaming issues

By J.D. Morris, Las Vegas Sun

Slot parlors, the role of technology in gambling and illegal sports betting are among the casino-related issues that the Nevada Legislature could take up when it convenes in three

months.

Draft requests for several gaming bills are posted on the Legislature's website, and while it's still too early to predict what will actually become law, elected officials are beginning to talk about possibilities. It was a big focus at a legislative panel during last week's gaming law conference in Las Vegas.

Gaming is an interest that transcends party lines, so the new Republican control over Carson City isn't likely to change the agenda much, legislators said during the panel. That doesn't mean every elected official is on the same page about what's best for the gaming industry, but where differences arise, they may not be strictly partisan ones.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe looking to tweak vacation rental rules

By Kathryn Reed

It depends who you talk to if there is a problem with vacation rentals in South Lake Tahoe. Some houses just seem to attract loud guests. Others are a welcome addition to neighborhoods. All may have their regulations tweaked soon.

The City Council on Nov. 18 engaged in another round of discussions about the ordinance that has been in place since 2003 and that was updated in 2011.

Noise is the No. 1 issue, with trash and parking the other major concerns.

There are 1,544 licensed vacation home rentals in the city limits, with the bulk – 316 – in the Tahoe Keys.

In the first nine months of this year there were 158 noise complaints from these rentals. That is down from 468 in 2013. Vacation home rentals account for 25 percent of the noise complaints the police department receives.

But not everyone believes this is an accurate number. Even Mayor Hal Cole said he believes the numbers are higher based on what he is told by residents.

“I think the numbers are underrepresented from personal experience,” Councilman-elect Austin Sass said. “I was told by dispatch that code enforcement wasn’t working at night and officers were busy. I think people stop calling when they hear this.”

Sass was one of 10 members of the public to speak at the Tuesday meeting.

Josh Priou with Lake Tahoe Accommodations called the number of complaints “minor”. He said his company booked 6,900 nights in those nine months, which accounts for 15 percent of the market. He added that citywide there would have been about 46,000 rental nights. Lake Tahoe Accommodations didn’t receive a complaint in that time period.

Priou said there will always be jerks, and added that the teeth in the ordinance is the threat of suspension or revocation of the permit.

Police Chief Brian Uhler, whose department oversees the permitting and enforcement of these rentals, suggested the word “overnight” be removed from the ordinance. The ordinance now limits the number of overnight guests, but not how many can be there during the day. Doing so could also alleviate some parking problems.

City Attorney Tom Watson said the legalities of doing so would have to be investigated.

A representative with Lake Tahoe Getaways said, "Guests need to have skin in the game." In other words, cite them, not just the owner.

Noise from people in hot tubs late at night is an issue. Uhler suggested finding a way to turn off the jets at a certain hour so people would not be raising their voices to talk above them.

Others proposed if that is a constant source of the noise problem, then possibly the hot tub needs to be removed.

Also proposed was a sliding scale for the permit fee based on number of rooms as well if it is operated by an agency or owner.

Requiring bear boxes was briefly touched on, but more talk was focused on whether South Tahoe Refuse could add a route for these rentals.

Adding an enforcement officer to possibly work Thursday-Sunday nights was also broached.

The vacation home rental issue is expected to return to the council in late January or early February for action. Tuesday's item was discussion only.

Fire damages Truckee house

A house in Truckee received moderate fire damage Nov. 17.

The cause of the Jeffrey Way fire in Prosser Lakeview Estates

is still under investigation.

“Remember to have working smoke detectors along with carbon monoxide detectors, clean your chimney prior to use. Store your used ashes in metal container placed on the ground away from any combustible material,” Truckee fire officials said in a statement.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Ex-EDC leader receives hefty payout

Even though the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors didn't have to pay Terri Daly anything when she resigned earlier this month, they are – well, the taxpayers are.

The supes agreed the now former chief administrative officer should receive \$153,519.57. That is equivalent to nine months of her base salary.

Had the county fired Daly, she would have only been entitled to three month's pay based on her contract.

“She is also entitled to her leave balances, such as vacation and floating holiday leave. And finally, she will receive one month of a COBRA to extend health benefits one month after separation,” Robyn Drivon, county counsel, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The decision to accept Daly's resignation and the payout was all one vote – 3-2. Supervisors Norma Santiago and Ron Briggs, who are both termed out and will leave in January, were the dissenting votes. Both believe Daly had been doing a great job

and said as much Nov. 4 after the vote.

Assistant CAO Kim Kerr has given notice and will be leaving Dec. 26.

Human Resources Director Pam Knorr is running the county while the county looks for a CAO.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Kim Kerr's retirement is effective December 30th.

Congress prefers drivers over public transit

By Emily Badger, Washington Post

The federal tax code has a weird way of favoring people who drive to work over those who take public transit there.

If you're a driver, the federal commuter benefit allows you to spend up to \$245 of your pre-tax income each month on parking at work. If you pay to take the bus or train instead, the benefit is only about half that – \$130.

For several years now, transit advocates have gone back and forth with Congress trying to equalize the benefits (or remove the bias, depending on how you look at it). And for a brief and glorious period, the Recovery Act (and some extensions) temporarily did that.

This year, however, for lack of action from Congress, the transit benefit shrank back to its old level. And now Chuck Schumer and several other members of Congress are trying to

revive the issue during the lame-duck session.

Read the whole story

Ex-DCSO deputy a suspect in casino takeover

By Associated Press

A former Douglas County sheriff's deputy is among three Nevadans named as fugitive suspects in the armed takeover of a tribal casino in California last month.

The U.S. Marshall's office in Reno identified the Nevadans Tuesday as 38-year-old Brian Auchenbach of Gardnerville, 46-year-old Timothy Tofaute and 35-year-old David Dixon, both of Sparks.

Authorities say the three have extensive experience in the military, private security and firearms testing, and should be considered armed and dangerous.

Tofaute is a former Navy Seal. Auchenbach was a Marine before becoming a deputy.

They're among 15 suspects in the Oct. 9 takeover of the Chukchansi Indian Resort and Casino in Coarsegold.

They're accused of kidnapping, false imprisonment and assault with a deadly weapon in what investigators say is part of a power struggle between tribal factions.