

DC commissioners waffle on water decisions



Douglas County residents are not happy with how the electeds are handling water issues at the lake.
Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Water issues brought out the masses to Thursday's Douglas County Commission meeting in Stateline.

People are not happy with the prospect of rates going up as much as 50 percent and the county's going back on its June decision to consolidate water companies.

So many residents were at the Oct. 16 meeting that they didn't fit into the room and had to stand in the lobby area of the county administrative building. The meeting, which started at 1:30pm, did not get over until after 9pm.

The districts affected are Zephyr Water Utility District, Cave Rock/Uppaway and Skyland – all at Lake Tahoe.

Residents thought everything was a done deal because in June the commissioners approved rates to go up and for consolidation. The idea was that combining maintenance and operation expenses would be more cost-effective. Debt, though, would have remained separate.

One enterprise fund has been created for the districts, but the county is keeping separate accounting departments for each system.

Consolidation of the water systems is now off the table indefinitely.

“ZWUD did a special assessment of \$7,500 per parcel some years ago, thus the systems have too much difference in their infrastructure needs as well as current debt and operational/maintenance costs to do consolidation now,” Commissioner Nancy McDermid told *Lake Tahoe News*.

But it’s not like the commissioners didn’t know about the special assessment in June.

At the meeting McDermid said consolidation could be revisited.

On Thursday the commissioners unanimously approved ZWUD rates to increase. Monthly rates will go from \$79.95 to \$99.91 starting Nov. 1. This 25 percent increase will remain in effect for the next two years. The other water rate items were for discussion, with no vote being taken.

“We will be coming back to them with proposed rates based on the info they provided,” County Manager Jim Nichols told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Cave Rock has retained legal counsel.

“Cave Rock Water System likely will sue if this isn’t resolved correctly,” a customer at the meeting told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The county previously voted for consolidation, but now is changing its mind. We already are paying more than \$200 a

month and they want to increase that.”

Cave Rock customers support total consolidation.

A letter to the commission from the law firm Kaempfer Crowell in Reno says, “Through consolidation and an appropriate ratemaking process, the long-term viability of CRWS and the county’s other water systems can be ensured. Moreover, consolidation will allow the county to budget for and spread the costs of infrastructure overhauls over the long term and over the entire county.”

Lake Tahoe water district issues will continue to be on future commission agendas.

Liberty Utilities seeks rate increase

Calpeco, parent company of Liberty Utilities, on Oct. 15 filed a request with the California Public Utility Commission for a rate increase.

If approved, the increase would take effect Jan. 1.

Liberty is the electric provider for the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin, as well as Alpine County and Truckee.

The increase for residential customers is 0.66 percent.

Comments or protest letters may be emailed to public.advisor@cpuc.ca.gov.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

N.J. to approve real-money skill gambling, Nev. may follow

By Wayne Parry, AP

ATLANTIC CITY — Sure you love matching little candy pieces with each other, or spelling out words with your pals. But New Jersey gambling regulators want to let you do it for real money.

The state Division of Gaming Enforcement says it is seeking game developers' proposals to conduct real-money gambling on skill-based games, which would make New Jersey a nationwide laboratory for a betting phenomenon many have predicted will become the next big thing.

And because of its vast potential reach, some are worried that the addictive nature of the games and their easy availability on smartphones and tablets could cause some people to get in way over their heads when the money is real. But New Jersey sees it as another way to help its struggling casino industry.

"More and more we've been watching the social gaming arena and hearing about the opportunities it presents," said David Rebuck, director of New Jersey's Division of Gaming Enforcement. "We thought, 'Wait a minute: why aren't these companies coming to us?' We are ready, willing and able, under existing law, to deal with this. This is not theoretical anymore; this is real."

Eric Meyerhofer, CEO of Gamblit Gaming, which adds gambling components to familiar social games, says the potential market

in the United States for such betting is \$8 billion to \$10 billion.

“Casual games are played in such abundance across such a wide demographic,” he said. “We think there’s quite a large market for this.”

Players could face off against one another to compete for a prize, with the casino taking a fixed percentage of it.

Game developers would have to partner with one of Atlantic City’s eight casinos, in the same way that Internet gambling providers must do. And like online gamblers, players of real-money skill games must be physically located within New Jersey’s borders. (New Jersey can approach other jurisdictions about multi-state gambling compacts if there’s enough interest.) Nevada is considering a similar plan, and other countries including England and Mexico are testing similar technology.

Currently, most games offer free play up to certain limits. From there, players can buy additional chances to play or equipment to use in the game. Ashley Feinberg, a staff writer at Gizmodo.com, quickly burned through \$286 in less than a month buying additional play time on Candy Crush Saga.

“It’s all very high-reward; you get sucked in and there’s this big reward and then it goes away and you keep trying to get it back,” she said. “Unless you actually seek out how much you’re actually spending on this, it goes like nothing. It feels like Monopoly money.”

After writing her first-person account, Feinberg kicked the habit – for a while.

“Then it went back downhill,” she said, adding she doesn’t know how much the second binge has cost her.

“I’m scared to look,” she said.

Gary Loveman, CEO of Caesars Entertainment, has long lamented that people spend millions of dollars on games like Farmville – where they buy equipment for a virtual farm – with none of that money going to his company.

“Millennials typically find traditional slot machines boring because there’s little or no skill involved; they’d much rather play games where there’s an element of skill and the opportunity to socialize or compete with friends while doing so,” said Caesars spokesman Gary Thompson. “It’s clear skill-based games are going to be a big part of the industry’s future.”

Les Bernal, national director of Stop Predatory Gambling, is worried New Jersey could be creating a new generation of problem gamblers.

“State officials know the future of New Jersey’s casinos hinges on luring kids to develop a gambling habit,” he said, adding that by taking games that thousands of young people already play and turning them into gambling games, the state is trying to create a new generation of gamblers to exploit.

Players would fund an account that would be good for in-person play on a casino floor, or remotely via a smartphone, tablet or computer. While details still need to be worked out, the games have to meet complex rules incorporating minimum payout standards that apply to slot machines, while also providing for the variable element of player skill.

So far, some of the biggest names are taking a pass. Zynga, which makes Words With Friends, has said it doesn’t favor real-money gambling on its platforms, preferring to focus on free-play. King Digital Entertainment, the makers of Candy Crush Saga, said it “does not have any plans to license Candy Crush Saga or any of our other games for use in casino slot machines or for any form of gambling.”

Barton prepped for Ebola patients

By Vicki McKenna

Barton Health is committed to the safety of our patients, visitors, staff, and physicians. After receiving several confirmed cases of the Ebola virus disease in the United States, Barton Health is prepared to care for and respond to suspected Ebola cases.

Though the Ebola virus has not reached California or Nevada and the risk is currently low, we take the threat very seriously. An Ebola virus disease workgroup comprised of Barton Health leaders and staff has been formed and we have developed an Ebola preparedness plan. By collaborating with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, El Dorado County Public Health, and other health agencies across the nation, Barton Health will be able to deliver the most up-to-date information and most effective action plan to combat the virus.

Barton Memorial Hospital currently follows the CDC's recommendations for hospital infection control to safely manage and isolate a patient with Ebola or other highly infectious disease. Should it become necessary, Barton Health staff and physicians are prepared to care for possible Ebola patients and protect the community at large.

As described by a Centers for Disease Control official, the information about Ebola is changing "daily and rapidly." To keep our patients, visitors, and community safe, Barton Health is taking actions should a suspected Ebola patient arrive. Actions include additional screening about travel history,

isolation precautions and procedures, and ongoing education and training.

Travel history screening

As an additional precaution, patients who enter the Barton Health inpatient and outpatient offices will be asked about their travel history. If you or someone you know has traveled to a high-risk country in Africa within the last 21 days or has been exposed to someone who has, the second step is to monitor for Ebola's signs and symptoms. Ebola resembles the flu and signs and symptoms may include a high fever, stomach ache, headache, vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, muscle aches, and unexplained bleeding. Ebola can only be spread by an infected patient if signs and symptoms are present.

Isolation precautions and procedures

For suspected Ebola patients, Barton Health has prepared isolation rooms and procedures to protect Barton Health patients, visitors, staff, and physicians. In addition, appropriate protective equipment and disposal methods are in place.

Education and training

Barton's Emergency Management Services has implemented practice drills and walk-throughs to prepare for a real case scenario, should it arise. Ongoing education and training is also being conducted for clinical and non-clinical staff.

We encourage all members of the community to stay informed. Visit the Centers for Disease Control website for an Ebola checklist and the most updated information.

Vicki McKenna is an infection preventionist with Barton Health.

Stabbing suspect arrested; woman in hospital

Updated 4:45pm:

A South Lake Tahoe woman is fighting for her life at an area hospital after being stabbed Wednesday night.

The man accused of the stabbing – her husband – fled, but was arrested Thursday afternoon. Thomas Payne, 36, of South Lake Tahoe faces attempted murder charges.

Officers are not releasing the name of the 35-year-old victim.

“We don’t know how the altercation occurred or what happened,” Lt. David Stevenson told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The woman was stabbed in the upper chest and neck area. Details about the object used in the crime or even if it was located at the residence have not been released. The call came in at 8:47pm Oct. 15 on Lukins Way. The victim was able to go to a neighbor’s to seek aid.

The suspect left as officers arrived. On Thursday afternoon he returned to their residence where he was arrested by South Lake Tahoe police officers.

“The victim was transported to the hospital and went into emergency surgery to save her life. Prior to surgery the victim identified her assailant as Thomas Payne and divulged additional details of domestic violence,” officers said in a press release.

Child Protective Services was called to take the couple’s 6-month-old child.

1,000 pounds of pot found during King Fire

By KCRA-TV

Police found about 1,000 pounds of marijuana that had been smuggled out of one of the evacuated communities in El Dorado County during the King Fire, officers said Monday.

“Although our officers were busy with road closures during the King Fire, enforcement did not stop,” the Placerville California Highway Patrol posted on Facebook, along with photos of the apparent drug bust.

Read the whole story

McClintock, Moore get personal in debate

By Christopher Cadelago, Sacramento Bee

Rep. Tom McClintock and challenger Art Moore sparred in a debate Tuesday marked by fierce character attacks that generated audience groans but put some distance between the two Republicans.

It was still dark out at 7am when the candidates took to their lecterns for the hastily planned, 60-minute exchange before about 100 people at Auburn City Hall. The three-term incumbent from Elk Grove and political newcomer from Roseville, running to represent the Placer County-centered district, took questions from the crowd on issues ranging from the national debt to climate change to fire protection.

But it was issues of character and who has the better temperament to lead the rural district, which incorporates Yosemite and Lake Tahoe and runs to Fresno, that coursed through the forum.

Moore, a 36-year-old combat veteran and Army officer, opened by saying it was cowardly of McClintock to pull out of a previously planned event because he wanted campaign representatives to review questions in advance. The Auburn native then reprised a familiar critique, thanking McClintock for “driving from your district, the (neighboring) 7th District, to my district, the 4th District, and making yourself available to the voters to answer their questions.” The line drew applause, but also rebuke from McClintock supporters.

McClintock, who sided with majority House Republicans during the partial government shutdown, said he could rent a room in Roseville as Moore has done to satisfy the residency issue.

Read the whole story

Woman accused of DUI near

school

A South Lake Tahoe woman was taken into custody Oct. 14 after allegedly hitting two vehicles was under the influence of alcohol.

Alejandra Lopez, 22, was arrested on charges of driving under the influence, hit and run, and assault with a deadly weapon, which was her vehicle.

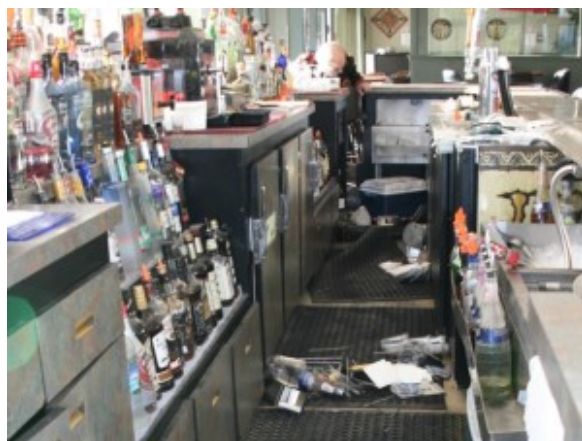
The incident started near South Tahoe Middle School on Tuesday.

Police Lt. David Stevenson told *Lake Tahoe News* one of the victims followed the suspect until officers stopped her on Pioneer Trail just west of Golden Bear Trail.

No one was injured.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Bears hit food pantry, restaurant



A bear broke into Flight
Deck restaurant Tuesday
night. Photo/Tracy Franklin

Bears broke into the Christmas Cheer food pantry and Flight Deck restaurant this week in South Lake Tahoe.

Christmas Cheer, which provides food year-round to those in need, was raided by the bruin on Oct. 13. Organizers are asking for donations to restock the shelves of the nonprofit on Third Street. To help, call 530.542.4934.

The restaurant at Lake Tahoe Airport is closed today as owners cleanup the mess left by a hungry bear.

The bear broke in the night of Oct. 14 through a patio window. The amount of damage is unknown.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Lake Tahoe about to hit natural rim



This was the Truckee River

flowing from Lake Tahoe in
Tahoe City in October 2013.
Photo/LTN file

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe is expected to drop below its natural rim this afternoon, which would be the first time in five years.

The rim is 6,223 feet.

There was still water coming out of the dam in Tahoe City on Wednesday morning.

"The forecast is for it to drop below and stay there this afternoon," Mark Faucette, senior forecaster with the National Weather Service in Reno, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The winds that have been gusting in the area for much of the last two days have not allowed for consistent water level readings. For example one hour on Oct. 15 gauges read the lake was two-hundredths of an inch below the rim and the next hour it was three-hundredths above the rim.

"We don't really get that much difference in an hour," Faucette explained.

When Tahoe drops below its rim it means no water is flowing into the Truckee River and therefore it is not reaching its end destination of Pyramid Lake.

The last time it dropped below the rim was late in the calendar year of 2009. Faucette said once it goes below the rim to not expect to it rise above it for a while. The only thing that would change that prediction is if the area gets a big rain event.

"Snow won't bring it up. We need rain and runoff to bring it back up," Faucette said. "The ground around the lake is pretty dry so it takes a lot to moisten it up to get runoff."

There is a small system in the forecast for Friday night into Saturday, but it could fizzle out before it reaches the Sierra.

“There’s another trough for early next week that could give us some chance of moisture on Monday into Tuesday, and an increase of winds, but not like last night,” Tony Fuentes with the NWS said.

The official water year started Oct. 1. This makes year four of the drought that has been drying out California and Nevada.