SLT pushing forward with recreational pot laws

By Kathryn Reed

The goal is for the initial draft of South Lake Tahoe's recreational marijuana ordinance to be completed by the end of the month or early March so the Planning Commission could discuss it at a special meeting next month.

An attorney with Burke, Williams & Sorensen is writing the document. This is because interim City Attorney Nira Doherty, who works for that firm, is on vacation.

The goal is for the council to have an ordinance to discuss at the March 20 meeting.

After a nearly 3½ hour meeting on the topic on Feb. 20, it was decided that the recommendations of the community working group should form the foundation of the ordinance. From there the Planning Commission and City Council will fine tune things.

The main issues still to be debated are the number of shops (three were proposed by the group), where they would be located (anywhere as long they meet buffer requirements for schools and the like, the group says), and whether micro businesses should be allowed (no says the group).

The Tuesday meeting started out as a rehash of what was presented to the council **earlier this month**.

More than 70 people attended the workshop at Tahoe Beach Retreat. This was a joint session of the City Council and Planning Commission. As the presentation was in progress members could ask for a topic to be discussed in depth later. When "later" will be remains a mystery since it didn't happen

at that meeting.

What was a little different was the preferential treatment given to Lake Tahoe Unified School District and Barton Health. Both were asked to be part of the city's working group, both chose not to. They were called up to the lectern first by Mayor Wendy David.

Reps from both spoke of how there is already a drug problem in town and how there aren't enough resources – aka money – to cope.

Police Chief Brian Uhler was also given the opportunity to spend ample time on how he wants to curtail expansion of marijuana in the city limits.

Ironically, though, it was said there is no base line data from which to prove going forward with recreational pot shops would increase or decrease use or crime. It was not explained why the schools, police and Barton can't collate their respective data to come up with solid information.

Many see pot shops as a cash cow in terms of tax revenue. The potential is there. Caution was urged, though, in terms of implementing too high of a tax so as not to drive the product underground where it would be less expensive for the consumer and possibly more dangerous an unregulated drug. Barton and LTUSD are hoping for a piece of the tax revenue.

Man spends night outside after skiing out of bounds

Two men who skied outside of Heavenly Mountain Resort's

boundaries were cited after being rescued. One of them had to spend the night in the wilderness with a search and rescue crew.

The incident started Feb. 22 at 5pm when the duo called for help. They told Douglas County sheriff's dispatch they had some water, but were wet and cold, their cell phone batteries were diminished, and one was suffering from a medical condition.

Search and rescue members found Timothy Dane, 24, from Branford, Conn., and Eshai Delacruz, 25, of San Francisco in Mott Canyon.

Delacruz and SAR members were able to get to safety that night. He was cited for skiing out of bounds, which carries a bail/fine of $640.

Dane was unable to evacuate on foot because of a medical condition unrelated to their misadventure. The storm prevented an air rescue. He and SAR members spent the night in the single-digit weather during the snow storm. Beforehand another SAR team responded to the shelter location to bring medication to Dane.

On Friday morning a Blackhawk rescue helicopter from Fallon Naval Air Station airlifted Dane out of the forest. Once safe he declined further treatment. However, he was cited for skiing out of bounds

SAR teams from El Dorado and Washoe counties assisted.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif. weighs renewing drought-era water restrictions

By Jonathan J. Cooper, AP

SACRAMENTO — A proposal to make California's drought-era water restrictions permanent could allow the state to chip away at long-held water rights in an unprecedented power grab, representatives from water districts and other users told regulators this week.

Members of the state Water Resources Control Board delayed a decision about whether to bring back what had been temporary water bans from California's drought, spanning 2013 to 2017. The plan is part of an effort to make water conservation a way of life, with climate change expected to lead to longer, more severe droughts.

It comes after U.S. officials declared that nearly half the state, all of it in the south, is back in drought just months after emerging from it.

Read the whole story

EDC firefighter accuses chief, male colleagues of

sexism

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

LisaMarie Mason began her firefighting career with the El Dorado Hills Fire Department in June 2007, the only female in her class.

For the next decade, Mason claims, she endured a workplace where she was denied training that male firefighters were granted and was subjected to a barrage of sexist comments from her superiors.

“This country went wrong when it allowed women to vote,” then-Battalion Chief Dave Roberts allegedly told her, then nicknamed her “Homeplate” when he discovered she was single because “everyone scores.”

Read the whole story

Dems fight among themselves as they work to replace McClintock

By Emily Cadei, Sacramento Bee

California Democrats face a crucial task as they gather in San Diego this weekend for their annual convention: deciding the party’s endorsements in a handful of crowded congressional races. That includes the increasingly fractious 4th Congressional District contest, where some local leaders are hoping the decision to endorse a candidate will help stem some

of the infighting – and turn the race's focus to ousting veteran House Republican Tom McClintock.

The traditionally Republican district, which includes El Dorado County, parts of Placer County and eight others that stretch into the Sierra Nevada mountains, has seen a surge of energy and excitement on the Democratic side since President Trump's election. Despite the long political odds, activists believe whichever Democrat gets out of the top-two primary could give McClintock a run for his money.

Two of the three Democrats running for McClintock's seat – Regina Bateson and Roza Calderon – are urging the party to let the voters sort out who that will be in June, and not weigh in with an endorsement now. But "Democrats, in general, I think they would like to see an endorsed candidate," said Eric Sunderland, the state party's regional director based in Sacramento. It could "help clean the field up a little bit."

Read the whole story

Shining light on SLT's contract with law firm

By Kathryn Reed

It is normal for government bodies to have an attorney with their best interests in mind review all contracts.

That doesn't appear to have happened last fall when the South Lake Tahoe City Council entered into an agreement for Burke, Williams & Sorensen to provide city attorney services on an interim basis.

Mayor Wendy David told *Lake Tahoe News*, “I’m not aware of an outside attorney reviewing the contract.”

So, this means there was no independent review of the contract.

It was signed by outgoing City Attorney Tom Watson, who was leaving because he was tired of the city. No one thought to question if he would have the city’s best interests at heart at that juncture and whether it was appropriate for him to handle the contract for his successor.

The contract was also signed by then Mayor Austin Sass and Eric Vail of the law firm.

That contract states, “Burke will not employ or otherwise incur an obligation to pay other counsel, specialists or experts for services in connection with this agreement without prior written approval of the city attorney.”

In other words, the law firm has carte blanche to hire whomever it wants for presumably whatever reason and the city has no say because the firm is the city attorney.

That open ended allowance is how Nira Doherty, who is the law firm’s designee to be South Lake Tahoe’s interim city attorney, was able to approve the contract with Municipal Resource Group. Mary Egan, who heads MRG, is the one who came in last fall at the urging of Sass to assess the culture of the city.

Even so, with the council taking action in closed session to approve the agreement it needed to be reported in open session. It never has been. All that the city has provided to *Lake Tahoe News* is the agreement MRG sent to the city, not the actual contract.

While city officials have told *LTN* at some point the contract is going to come back to correct that Brown Act violation,

this could be a violation of the California Constitution in regards to approving a contract retroactively.

Doherty allowed the council to violate the Brown Act by not insisting the MRG contract be reported in open session. Brown Act violations are misdemeanors; every council member could be charged.

The MRG agreement called for Sass to arrange meeting space at the Marriott for Egan to conduct her interviews with council and department heads.

Lake Tahoe News has asked for detailed bills regarding the law firm, but to date has only received totals. The contract with the firm says, "As a condition precedent to any payment to Burke under this agreement, Burke shall submit monthly to the city separate statements of account which clearly sets forth by dates the designated items of work for which the billings are submitted." So, clearly, those details exist.

There is also a question as to what role Doherty really has. In October, she filled out the state Form 700 disclosing economic interests. Under office/agency/court she listed city of South Lake Tahoe, with her position being city attorney.

This makes it appear she is an officer of the city.

The contract with the law firm further states, "No member of the governing body of the city, and no other officer, employee or agent of the city who exercises any functions or responsibilities in connection with the carrying out of any project, to which this agreement pertains, shall have any personal interest, direct or indirect, in this agreement."

That would mean Doherty would have a conflict with said agreement because she does have a personal and direct interest.

California Government Code 1090 says, "Members of the

Legislature, state, county, district, judicial district, and city officers or employees shall not be financially interested in any contract made by them in their official capacity, or by anybody or board of which they are members. Nor shall state, county, district, judicial district, and city officers or employees be purchasers at any sale or vendors at any purchase made by them in their official capacity."

If she is an officer of the city as written on Form 700, it appears she violated the Government Code by devising a contract with the city in which she benefits. This is a felony.

Doherty is on vacation. At this week's council meeting she said she would be unavailable for comment during this time.

Doherty has asked for her law firm's contract to be on the March 20 council agenda.

Shootings put teachers in role as human shields

By Julie Turkewitz, New York Times

TAMARAC, Fla. — The shooting was all over, but the emotional reckoning had just begun, and so on Saturday the teachers of Broward County packed their union hall to discuss what it meant to have become the nation's human shields.

"Last night I told my wife I would take a bullet for the kids," said Robert Parish, a teacher at an elementary school just miles from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High, where a former student killed 17 people, including three staff members who

found themselves in the line of fire.

Since the attack last week, said Parish, “I think about it all the time.”

Across the country, teachers are grappling with how their roles have expanded, from educator and counselor to bodyguard and protector. They wonder if their classrooms are properly equipped, if they would recognize the signs of a dangerous student, and most of all, if they are prepared to jump in front of a bullet.

Read the whole story

Placer pilots Hwy. 89 project to relieve congestion

Southbound traffic on Highway 89 can back up from the entrance of Squaw Valley to Interstate 80 during a big ski weekend.

On Saturday, Placer County will continue a pilot project to extend the turn lane into the resort, aimed at relieving this congestion.

Placer began a limited trial of the turn lane extension Feb. 17, and will launch it in full Feb. 24 and March 3.

The existing turn lane into Squaw Valley is only about 250 feet, which accommodates about 12 cars. Cars eventually spill into the highway, holding up through traffic. The pilot project will extend the turn lane along the road shoulder by 2,000 feet, separating another 100 cars from southbound through traffic.

Electronic signs will be placed along the highway.

‘Bachelor’ a boon for Lake Tahoe tourism

By Bridget Chavez, KOLO-TV

A handful of Lake Tahoe locations featured on an episode of “The Bachelor” has businesses seeing an increase in traffic and overall interest.

Michelle Wickham is a big fan of the show and says she booked her flight to Reno-Tahoe International Airport within hours of seeing the episode.

“I’m a huge Bachelor fan and watch every episode, and I recently met some friends from Reno, and then when I watched ‘The Bachelor,’ I saw that Lake Tahoe was featured on there, and I saw that it was just gorgeous and there was an awesome lake and scenery, and I just wanted to come and check it out,” she says.

Read the whole story

EDC district apologizes for

raffling off an AR-15

By Ellen Garrison, Sacramento Bee

The Cameron Park Community Services District issued a statement Monday apologizing for raffling off an AR-15 rifle at a weekend fundraiser for its fire department.

Some attendees of the Cameron Park Fire Fighters Association's annual crab feed on Feb. 17 had said they were upset to find the firearm included among the raffle items. The same type of weapon was used in the recent school shooting in Parkland, Fla., that left 17 dead.

"The district deeply apologizes for this insensitivity to the youth and families affected by the horrific event in Florida and other mass shootings," the district's board said in a statement.

Read the whole story