WCSO removing lieutenant from Tahoe office

Changes are coming to the Incline Village substation of the Washoe County Sheriff's Department.

It will no longer be led by a lieutenant as of Feb. 19.

However, a sergeant and four deputies will continue work from the Tahoe facility.

The change is for financial reasons.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Comments being taken on Sierra Blvd. project

People have until March 7 to comment on the mitigated negative declaration for the **Sierra Boulevard Complete Streets Project** in South Lake Tahoe.

The document is available **online**.

This project consists of planning, design, and permitting for full rehabilitation of Sierra Boulevard, an approximately 0.63-mile long arterial road. Sierra Boulevard will serve as a tie in location for the planned South Tahoe Greenway Shared Use Trail being implemented by the California Tahoe Conservancy.

The project will also incorporate Caltrans' planned intersection improvements at Sierra Boulevard and Highway 50,

which is scheduled for construction in 2018-19.

SLT struggles to cultivate workable pot regulations

By Kathryn Reed

The future of recreational marijuana and even expanded medicinal offerings in South Lake Tahoe remains hazy.

It might become a littler clearer after Tuesday's cannabis workshop being led by the City Council. The focus is on retail sales in the city limits. The meeting begins at 5pm Feb. 20 at Tahoe Beach Retreat.

The community cannabis subcommittee delivered recommendations to the City Council on Feb. 6. Not all of the electeds were enamored with what was presented. That subcommittee has met at least twice since then. Members are expected to be at the workshop to share tweaks they've made, answer questions and provide information.

Some of the subcommittee recommendations include:

· All shops should sell marijuana for recreational and medicinal use.

· Delivery should be allowed if tied to a storefront, with GPS tracking.

· No outdoor cultivation.

· Maximum grows of 5,000 square feet.

· Local tax of at least 3½ percent of gross receipts, with tax question going to voters in November at the earliest.

· Allow three retail licenses.

· No one with a felony allowed to open a shop.

· Prefer local operators.

· Provide a place for people to consume the pot so it's not being done illegally at a tourist accommodation; and provide a shuttle service.

· Allow local law enforcement enhanced access to the facility and books.

Some of the issues brought up by the council and/or the public centered on the distribution regulations and whether to allow microbusinesses.

It is ultimately up to the City Council to decide what to do. It can adopt some, all or none of the subcommittee recommendations.

The state has a number of rules that are already in place that can only be changed by the city by making them stronger, more restrictive.

The council has an urgency ordinance in place regarding recreation pot. It was first approved in December and then extended in January by 10 months and 15 days per state law. The plan was to amend it on Feb. 6 to allow for development agreements. However, the city was provided with inaccurate legal advice by interim City Attorney Nira Doherty at the second January meeting. She said it would be fine to amend the ordinance in February. That would have been illegal. So, the ordinance as first approved is what is in effect.

The whole urgency ordinance could be replaced and then the urgency measure would be disbanded. This is the likely

scenario as the city moves forward with the recreational ordinance.

Barton Health was asked to participate and chose not to.

“Barton participates in the Community Health Advisory Committee, a group of local health and wellness organizations facilitated by the Barton Foundation that identifies unmet health needs in the community. This group is working to make a recommendation to City Council that a portion of tax revenue generated by the sale of cannabis be used for education, awareness and prevention surrounding minors and cannabis use,” Barton spokeswoman Jenna Palacio told *Lake Tahoe News.*

It’s not clear if Councilman Jason Collin will be able to vote his conscience for the city or be beholden to the stance his employer takes if they are different.

While the subcommittee started with 15 members, there have only been 13 who have actually participated. The other two were Barton employees.

It’s expected that recreational facilities would also be allowed to sell medicinal marijuana. The current medical marijuana ordinance only allows for three such establishments in the city, with the council needing to sign off on all future ones. Today there is only one such business.

Tahoe Wellness Cooperative was one of the original three. It has been on tenuous footing with the city for a while. Litigation is ongoing regarding the validity of the permit. It keeps being a closed session discussion with the council, with no reportable action being taken Feb. 6.

Cody Bass, who runs TWC, told *Lake Tahoe News* that he presented a settlement agreement to the council at that meeting. The council didn’t bite.

When asked why the agreement was rejected, Mayor Wendy David

told *LTN,* “This information is privileged and confidential.”

Bass is barely operating because he has not been able to restock his shelves with most products since the first of the year. This is in large part because the city told the state he doesn’t have a valid permit. It’s a technicality in that the court has allowed him to stay open as the dispute lingers.

“With regards to commercial sales of cannabis, Tahoe Wellness Cooperative has been engaged in commercial cannabis sales since we opened in 2009 and begin collecting sales tax, of which we’ve collected over a million dollars in sales tax to the state of California for commercial cannabis sales,” Bass told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The [state Bureau of Cannabis Control’s] statement is accurate and all commercial cannabis sales in the state of California will now be through for profit entities with no requirement to operate on a not for profit basis. The problem for TWC is that we cannot engage with other licensees as the bureau stated, therefore we cannot acquire the medicine our members require for their ailments, greatly hindering the products we carry for the sickest of our members. Something that happened only because of the chief of police writing a letter. The misinformation that was spread around that the city can’t authorize a for profit use because it is not written in their current ordinance is very inaccurate, and now even the city attorney agrees it’s inaccurate. State law allows for local authorization through a ‘permit’ or ‘other authorization,’ which in this case is clearly the stay from the superior court, not a statement saying there is ‘no authorized cannabis use in the city of South Lake Tahoe’ as the chief wrote to the bureau.”

That letter the police chief sent has nearly put TWC out of business.

Study: Cloud seeding really does work

By Matt Weiser, Water Deeply

Cloud seeding has become big business worldwide as a means to boost water supplies. Utilities and governments spend tens of millions of dollars on the process, which is especially common in Western states that rely on winter snowpack to meet year-round water demand.

The basic process involves spraying silver iodide from a plane as it flies through storm clouds. The silver iodide induces moisture in the cloud to form ice crystals, which then (hopefully) fall out as snow.

Some studies have estimated cloud seeding can boost snowfall by between 8 and 15 percent. This figure was derived by comparing snow depth on mountains beneath clouds that were seeded, compared to nearby mountains in unseeded areas affected by the same storm. And it was deduced that seeding made the difference.

Read the whole story

Trump budget would boost

Yucca project, cut Nevadans' safety net

By Yvonne Gonzalez, Las Vegas Sun

President Trump rolled out his budget proposal this week, reiterating some unfulfilled objectives from his first budget and reaffirming his priorities.

The $4.4 trillion 2019 budget rolls back Medicaid funding and Obamacare provisions impacting older adults. Among the expenditures: $716 billion for national defense spending and money for a U.S.-Mexico border wall.

After a year of failing repeatedly to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, which has helped many purchase insurance but resulted in higher premiums for some, the Trump administration is proposing to revisit the effort. The president's budget suggests a solution similar to a plan that Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., helped craft that would put block grants in place of ACA funding and cap Medicaid.

Read the whole story

Little consensus on VHR issues in El Dorado County



El Dorado County residents on Feb. 12 vent about VHRs to staff and electeds. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – The conversation has not changed. Proponents: Vacation home rentals are a fact of life in a tourist town. Opponents: VHRs ruin neighborhoods.

This week Sue Novasel and Mike Ranalli, the two El Dorado County supervisors who make up the ad hoc VHR committee, got an earful from people about the issue. While some spoke to specifics about the Apple Hill area, most were Tahoe residents with local opinions. About 70 people filled the CCC room in Meyers on Feb. 12.

The electeds were joined by reps from the county's legal department and Chief Administrative Office. They along with fire and law enforcement are the internal team at the county working on the issue.

The complaints in the county are much the same as they are in South Lake Tahoe, with noise, trash and parking the primary problems. Then there are those who think this is a commercial business, when it's not. And others believe the only place for a tourist is in a hotel.

Jobs and revenue for the county are some of the positives about the short-term rentals.

Monday's meeting was mostly an opportunity for county reps to listen to concerns. But it was stated by more than one attendee that it is time for action, which includes compromise.

On March 3 from 1-3pm at South Tahoe Middle School's multipurpose room the entire Board of Supervisors will reconvene. This is a continuation of the **Feb. 1 meeting** that was canceled because of overcrowding.

The county's working group has conceptually agreed to the following in regards to VHRs:

· Inspections for safety and compliance before a permit is issued.

· Doing an analysis to determine which county department should handle the issue.

· No warning for first violation.

· Increase penalties, with possible permit revocation after three incidents in an 18-month period.

· A maximum occupancy between 10pm and 8am.

· Exterior signage.

Those are just a fraction of the regulations on the table to be further vetted, then adopted, implemented and enforced.

Ranalli said the county is the process of rejiggering how it does enforcement on all issues, not just VHRs.

Novasel agreed more needs to be done about the whole issue, and that people need to feel safe.

NDOT adding fencing for animals along rural Hwy. 50

By Kenzie Bales, KRNV-TV

The Nevada Department of Transportation is planning a major fencing project along Highway 50 in Dayton in hopes of preventing vehicle and wildlife collisions.

Spokeswoman Meg Ragonese says the project tentatively planned for late fall 2018 or early spring 2019 will include approximately 10 additional miles of wildlife fencing from Stagecoach to the new USA Parkway extension in Silver Springs.

Right now – six and a half miles are fenced between east Dayton and Stagecoach and three miles are enclosed between USA Parkway and 95A in Silver Springs.

Read the whole story

Some Styrofoam products to be outlawed in SLT

By Lake Tahoe News

Starting this summer there should be a whole lot less Styrofoam in South Lake Tahoe.

The City Council this month gave direction to staff to come

back with an ordinance that would limit the use of polystyrene by businesses in town.

The product, which does not decompose, not only adds to landfills, but can be a further environmental hazard when small pieces look like food to animals.

The ban will affect restaurants the most, though many are already using to-go containers that are biodegradable. Some are compostable.

The presentation by Tracy Sheldon showed that switching the product should not be a huge financial burden to eateries.

Restaurants and other eating establishments will also have to ask people if they want a straw or plastic utensils, instead of automatically bringing it to the table or putting it in the to-go bag.

The council also opted to disallow the sales of coolers made with polystyrene.

The city for several years has had a policy in place through the special events permit that prohibits polystyrene. That remains intact.

The ordinance is expected to be presented to the council in March so it can be adopted in time before the summer tourist season.

Water conservation slipping

in California

By Paul Rogers, Bay Area News Group

As California suffers through another dry winter, increasing fears that drought conditions may be returning, the state's residents are dropping conservation habits that were developed during the last drought and steadily increasing their water use with each passing month.

A new analysis of state water records by this news organization found California's urban residents used 13.7 percent less water last year in the first eight months after Gov. Jerry Brown declared an end to the drought emergency than they used in the same eight-month period in 2013. But in each of those eight months last year, the water savings dropped from 20 percent in May to 2.8 percent in an unseasonably dry December.

"We are having a very dry winter again," said Heather Cooley, water program director at the Pacific Institute, an Oakland nonprofit that studies water use patterns. "That wet winter we saw last year could have been one wet winter in a 10-to-12 year drought period. We have to be very cautious about our water use."

Read the whole story

El Dorado Savings reports 2017 earnings

Placerville-based El Dorado Savings Bank reported after tax

earnings for 2017 of $13,915,922. This is an increase from earnings of $12,981,836 in 2016.

El Dorado ended the year with assets of $2,173,437,132, a $62 million increase from year-end 2016, and savings deposits rose by $50.2 million during 2017.

“The continued strong performance of the bank’s investments and loan portfolio contributed to the consistent earnings,” CEO George L. Cook Jr. said in a statement. “We maintained our focus on originating good quality residential loans in our local communities” said Cook “and we were pleased that El Dorado ended the year with only one foreclosed property on the books.”

El Dorado operates 31 offices in Northern California and four offices in Northern Nevada.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report