Opinion: Regional Plan update is just the beginning

By Joanne Marchetta

After years of scientific study and public involvement, the Regional Plan update is headed to the Governing Board of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency for a final vote in December. Depending on the final decision of the board on Dec. 12, a new framework for the environmental protection and restoration of Lake Tahoe could come online in the new year.

The board's vote to approve policy updates that have been vetted over many years is the springboard for Lake Tahoe community members to play the most important part in what you want your unique community to be.



Joanne Marchetta

Like any plan, it is only a path to a promising future, but it is the essential foundation for the next environmental leap forward. That leap will come from tailoring local area plans to the needs of each community around the lake. Because we need to remake what we have in order to protect the lake and its environment, we have now the best opportunity in half a century to rethink the form and function of our town centers.

TRPA has put forward a plan that advances restoration of the lake's clarity and other environmental improvements in part by

refocusing our Agency to the regional level. In doing so, TRPA proposes to transition to an area plan framework that reduces inefficient regulations and improves permit processes by integrating regional environmental threshold attainment with the plans of local governments and other land management agencies.

By now you may have heard about many of the policy updates that TRPA is proposing. The final draft plan includes innovations to make updating our homes and communities more feasible – modest amendments to land coverage accounting for decks on homes with BMPs, along with coverage exemptions for public bike trails and disabled access facilities. TRPA has used every means at our disposal to widely publicize and educate both those within and outside the Basin about the major tenets of the plan. The full draft plan, summaries and fact sheets are all available online and have been since April, along with volumes of public comments that have been responded to and incorporated into the documents that are up for consideration. Use this information to get involved in the final decision because without the plan as a foundation, the next positive steps for Tahoe remain elusive.

Only with the updated plan can communities take the next step to put forth their vision for town centers and get to the important business of place making. The plan creates a framework, but inside the bounds it’s not one size fits all – communities don’t have to be like one another. We did this in recognition that Kings Beach is not Tahoe City and Incline Village will never be South Shore. Within regional sideboards of environmental improvement and protection, area plans hold the promise to put local planning, local communities, and local destiny into your hands. Now is the time for communities to act collaboratively to fix our environmental, economic, and social problems. Seizing this opportunity is key – with the decision this December, the Tahoe region could have its launch pad for the next quantum leap forward in environmental

protection and overall sustainability for a national treasure.

The level of improvement to Lake Tahoe that is expected from the plan's emphasis on environmental redevelopment also cannot be understated, but like area planning, it is just the beginning of an adaptive management cycle every four years that will safeguard the natural environment by ensuring that unintended consequences do not go unchecked. While support for the Regional Plan update has been broad, we have also taken the concerns we have heard very seriously. Following the advice of conservation groups and state leaders, we have strengthened other safeguards in the plan. Environmental groups such as the League to Save Lake Tahoe and the Nevada Conservation League have been important stakeholders who have worked collaboratively on the plan along with the community advocates, business groups, and partner agencies who have been at the table since the update process began.

Whether you are familiar with the update or are still waiting for your opportunity to get involved, the last few meetings of the year on the Regional Plan are meaningful opportunities for you to be part of Lake Tahoe's future. Thank you for shaping the plan into what we believe will deliver a restored Lake Tahoe and revitalized communities that are more walkable and bikeable.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Opinion: Eastern District deserves full slate of judges

By Carl Tobias

Last week, Eastern District of California Judge Anthony Ishii assumed senior status after 15 years of valuable service. This means that the Eastern District will experience two openings in six judgeships. The Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts has designated both as emergencies because of the substantial caseloads that the district's judges carry.

These vacancies, which are one-third of the Eastern District positions, undermine justice. Thus, President Obama must swiftly nominate, and the Senate promptly confirm, judges for the empty seats.

Obama has robustly sought advice from Republicans and Democrats where openings arise before nominations. He has proposed nominees of even temperament, who are intelligent, ethical, industrious, independent and diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender and ideology. A quintessential example is Eastern District Judge Kimberly J. Mueller.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., the Judiciary Committee chair, has expeditiously scheduled hearings and votes, forwarding nominees to the floor where many languish for months. On Aug. 3, the Senate recessed without acting on 22 qualified nominees whom the panel reported because the GOP would not vote and again on Sept. 22 without considering 19 exceptional nominees.

Republicans should cooperate more. The major bottleneck is the floor. Sen. Mitch McConnell. R-Ky., the minority leader, has rarely agreed to votes. Most troubling has been GOP unwillingness to move noncontroversial, strong nominees — inaction that conflicts with Senate traditions. When the chamber has ultimately voted, it easily approved most

nominees, like Stephanie Rose, who won 89-1 appointment on Sept. 10.

The two Eastern District vacancies are essential. Obama has nominated one well-qualified individual. He should keep cooperating with Leahy and Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., the majority leader, who sets floor votes, and their Republican analogues to facilitate confirmation while nominating a superb candidate for Judge Ishii's opening.

Obama must also continue working closely with California Democratic Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer. Each has created merit selection commissions, which seek applications, interview prospects and make suggestions to the senators who correspondingly forward recommendations to the White House.

These efforts led Obama to nominate on June 25, Sacramento County Superior Court Judge Troy Nunley for the seat that opened when Judge Garland Burrell assumed senior status on July 4. The nominee earned the qualified American Bar Association rating. Nunley served as a deputy district attorney in Alameda County from 1991 to 1994 and in Sacramento County from 1996 to 1999 and served as deputy attorney general in the California Attorney General's Office from 1999 to 2002 when he joined the bench.

Leahy expeditiously scheduled a Sept. 19 hearing for Nunley at which Feinstein and Boxer voiced their strong support. Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, the ranking member, questioned the nominee, who acquitted himself well, and Grassley seemed satisfied with the judge's responses. However, the Judiciary Committee has not voted on Nunley because the Senate recessed on Sept. 22.

When senators return on Nov. 13, the panel must swiftly vote and McConnell must agree to a prompt vote on the nominee because he is well-qualified and the Eastern District desperately needs all six judges to effectively resolve its

enormous docket. Eastern District judges have carried twice the average caseload of judges in the remaining 93 federal districts for many years. The U.S. Judicial Conference, the courts' policy-making arm, has recommended that Congress authorize six new judgeships for the district. These suggestions are premised on conservative estimates of case and work loads. However, more judgeships will help little, if the Senate cannot confirm nominees.

Obama should rapidly nominate a talented candidate for Ishii's vacancy. The White House is not currently evaluating suggestions from the California senators, so the administration might encourage Feinstein and Boxer to quickly tender names. Once the president has nominated a fine candidate, the Senate must expeditiously process the nominee.

The two Eastern District of California openings undermine justice. Thus, Obama must swiftly nominate and senators must promptly approve excellent judges, so that the court can deliver justice.

Carl Tobias is the Williams Chair in Law, University of Richmond. This was written for McClatchy Newspapers.

Letter: Heavenly employees dish it up at Bread & Broth

To the community,

During the Oct. 15 Adopt A Day dinner, Heavenly's director of snow surfaces, Barrett Burghard expressed his thoughts on the

evening’s events: “It’s an eye-opener to see the need in the community. Glad to have the opportunity to help.”

Burghard, along with Jo Hearn, greeter/host supervisor; Jennifer Story, store manager at Embassy Suites; and Steve Turner, director of food and beverage made up the Heavenly Mountain Resort’s AAD volunteer crew. Many of the Heavenly’s crew members have volunteered frequently over the past year at the monthly AAD sponsorships hosted by Heavenly.

Heavenly is consistent with time and financial donations to B&B’s Adopt a Day program. Bread & Broth is sincerely grateful for their commitment to providing healthy, tasty meals to those in need.

If your are interested in donating $250 to sponsor a Monday evening meal, contact me at (530) 542.2876 or carolsgerard@aol.com.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: TTUSD budget issues linger despite Prop. 30 passing

By Rob Leri

Thanks to everyone who spread the word about how critical the vote was for us on Tuesday. I am pleased with the passage of Proposition 30. This provides a restoration of approximately $1.6 million in ongoing funding for Tahoe Truckee Unified School District.

While this is a significant gain for us, we are still deficit spending and using reserves, so we will continue to need some reductions in expenditures in order to balance our budget.

Although early winter storms hampered some of the meetings, I truly appreciate all of you who came to show support and interest in implementing our new vision for the school district and to share your thoughts and ideas. It will take ongoing collaboration among parents, teachers, and district staff to make this vision a reality for our scholars. We are checking on dates to schedule another evening Coffee and Conversation meeting in Truckee later this month.



Rob Leri

There was a lot of speculation about the two snow days in early October – why they were called and the outlook for the rest of the school year. The early nature of these storms and the heavy amount of snow in a short time presented some unique challenges. If we'd had these same conditions later in the year, it's possible that one of the snow days would not have been called. In the future, we will start posting a brief description on the TTUSD website about the reason a snow day is called.

On Oct. 18, the entire district participated in the Great American Shakeout to practice what to do should an earthquake hit during school hours. This was a great opportunity for staff and students to discuss emergency preparedness in general and to hone safe space practices and inform students of the best way to seek further help, when needed. Furthering

our emergency preparedness efforts, the district recently purchased a new radio system. The new system serves every facility in the district and now meets FCC narrowband requirements so that communication is now clearer and more immediate should an emergency arise.

TTUSD's energy saving and greening efforts continue to earn recognition from other districts and the industry. Since Anna Klovstad, C.E.M./project manager for TTUSD, introduced an energy saving plan for the district in 2008, TTUSD has saved more than $1 million. Students, faculty, and parents have embraced the effort and contributed to the district's success. Most recently TTUSD was recognized by Western Area Power Administration, a division of the U.S. Department of Energy, with a top headline story on their October Energy Services Bulletin.

We continue to celebrate our status as an All-America City and recognize our local early childhood educators, elementary school teachers, parents, and community organizations who work toward the goal of all students reading at grade level by 3rd grade. Third-grade reading is key to long-term student achievement because third grade is when the focus on reading changes from learning to read to reading to learn. If students aren't able to read instructional materials across the curriculum, their chance for success throughout school diminishes.

A great way for you to help your child advance his or her reading skills is by helping build their vocabulary. Help your child practice words that they don't know that they come across when reading. Provide a simple definition for your child, then use it in another example and encourage your child to come up with their own example. Finally, try to keep new words active by using them within your house. The more words a reader knows, the more they are able to comprehend what they are reading or listening to.

Please don’t forget to continue reading with your child over the holidays and school breaks. Thanks for making reading an integral part of your child’s life.

Rob Leri is superintendent of Tahoe Truckee Unified School District.

Opinion: NTPUD making cost-saving infrastructure improvements

By Paul Schultz

The North Tahoe Public Utility District proudly provides three core services to the residents of North Lake Tahoe from the California state line to Dollar Hill; fresh drinking water, transportation of sewage to the Tahoe Truckee Sanitation Agency for treatment, and providing high quality Parks facilities to our residents. The district also prides itself on being responsible stewards of the public’s money with recent capital improvements providing more efficiency while grant opportunities allow funds to go further and to do more with less.

In the last three years the district has spent $5,815,611 on capital improvement construction in the sewer and water departments and used grants to leverage the public’s dollars to get more done and increase efficiency within the district’s systems. Of that total, 21 percent, or $1,235,405, was constructed using grant funds from the U.S. Forest Service through the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act to support new water tanks and upgrades to water lines, including fire hydrants and

increasing water line sizes for improved fire flow.

All upgrades are done with an eye toward increased efficiency; replacing leaking water pipes conserves water and reduces unaccounted water losses and pumping costs.

For example, the replacement of 9,500 linear feet of water lines in the Kingswood Estates neighborhood, west of Highway 267 between Lincoln Green and North National Avenue, has resulted in a 37 percent reduction in unaccounted for water that will reduce the costs for treatment, storage, and pumping expenses. The District is currently replacing sewer mains in the area around Brook Avenue in the Kings Beach grid, which will improve access and help reduce the district's operational costs by allowing the District to abandon an old, mid-block sewer main that runs underneath buildings.

Water and sewer line relocations to support the Kings Beach Commercial Core Improvement Project will take place next construction season under a co-operative agreement with Placer County to minimize the disruption to the customers and help reduce the District's costs. The district has been working closely with Placer County to minimize the number of relocations necessary and has secured grant funding from the U.S. Forest Service through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, to pay for two-thirds of the relocation costs in the areas outside the state highway.

Many projects utilize grants for construction while others increase efficiency because of the project. Rehabilitation of sewer pump stations reduces energy use by modernizing pumps and motors that move our wastewater along Highway 28 and up and over Dollar Hill. The recently completed Secline Sewer Pump Station Rehabilitation Project has resulted in a 38 percent reduction in energy consumption from our 2011 usage due to the installation of new pumps and motors.

The North Tahoe Public Utility District is proud of the

services that it provides to our community and does all we can to make our resident’s dollars go farther by reducing operational costs and seeking grants when they are available. We will continue to move forward in this direction and do all we can to keep rates low while meeting state requirements and maintaining our infrastructure.

Paul Schultz is general manger-CEO of North Tahoe Public Utility District.

Letter: Not giving up on what Prop. 37 stood for

To the community,

Thank you Lake Tahoe News and local businesses. In my efforts to get Proposition 37 passed (GMO labeling) and in doing the small things I could do, I discovered the wonderful kindness and helpfulness of our local people.

It truly is the small business and individuals who make a difference.

Thank you all so much.

I won’t give up on this issue. It’s as important to our health and the health of the planet as global warming. Thank you again,

Peggy A. Cooley, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: Thanks for help at Bijou school

To the community,

Bijou Community School has once again benefited greatly from the kindness of our community. More than 40 Bijou parents, staff, and students along with a few South Lake Tahoe Rotarians built two beautiful native gardens at Bijou this past weekend.

Thank you so much, volunteers, for giving your time and energy to our last-minute project. Also, a huge thanks to Ed Cook Tree Service for donating wood chips, Dale Rise Construction for the very generous donation of more than 20 boulders, and John Fellows of Aspen Hollow for the use of his bobcat.

Lastly, I would like to thank Darah Zurit for her vision and donation of time and energy in creating these beautiful gardens. It is amazing what a few people can accomplish in a short period of time with the support of a wonderful community.

Thank you!

Kathy Haven, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: Variety of donors aid Bread & Broth

To the community,

Bread & Broth is a nonprofit, non-denominational, all volunteer organization that provides hot, well-balanced dinners every Monday at St. Theresa Church Parish Hall and a soup and bread meal at Lake Tahoe Community Presbyterian Church on Fridays to the less fortunate members of the South Lake Tahoe community.

The efforts of Bread & Broth for the past 23 years have been contingent upon the generosity of local businesses, clubs/organizations and private individuals. The Monday evening meals of Oct. 1 and Oct. 8th were no exception. Both of the evening meals were sponsored by individuals who participated in B&B's Adopt A Day of Nourishment program.

Lori London was the generous sponsor who hosted the Oct. 1 AAD meal and has been a sponsor in previous years. The Oct. 8th AAD meal was sponsored by an anonymous donor who has also been an ongoing sponsor over the past years.

Bread & Broth is sincerely thankful for the continued support of London and all of our many sponsors who have generously donated funds to ensure that the Bread & Broth program is able to continue this much needed community service.

For information on any monetary donations or volunteering opportunities, please contact me at (530) 542.2876 or carolsgerard@aol.com.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Setting priorities will keep Placer County afloat

By Jennifer Montgomery

All of us at Placer County can see better days ahead now that the worst of the economic slowdown is behind us.

We understand, though, the road to recovery will not be easy, and we will continue to struggle to find solutions as new, complex challenges present themselves along the way.

That is why the Board of Supervisors and county staff are working on an innovative, long-term plan to determine where Placer County should head over the next five years and how best to get there. Without identifying a target, how can you know what you are aiming for?



Jennifer Montgomery

The board has several overriding goals.

Costs must be kept under control to preserve the County's fiscal health. That goal is vital because County revenue is beginning to rebound from recession-era lows, but not fast enough to keep pace with expected cost increases.

Priorities must be set, so that we use the county's limited resources to meet the most important public safety and service needs.

The board must make sure its policy goals are met to place the County in a position to deal effectively and decisively with the next economic downturn.

The task is daunting, but we already are making good progress.

One of the board's first priorities was finding someone to oversee the effort as county executive officer. Our recruitment efforts led us to new CEO David Boesch, who has just the kind of background and expertise we were looking for.

One of Boesch's first tasks was to help oversee development of a critical piece of the puzzle: a five-year budget strategy for keeping revenue and costs in balance. Placer County already is making headway in achieving two of the strategy's goals: reducing the use of one-time revenues to fund ongoing operations and bolstering our depleted reserve funds now that county revenue is beginning to recover.

Another important piece of the puzzle is an innovative, all-inclusive and overdue effort to identify needed infrastructure projects and to fund critical construction and maintenance projects.

Placer County has individual infrastructure plans in place for several types of projects, including facilities, public works, information technology, and fire facilities and equipment.

The new comprehensive funding plan will consider those types of projects, plus others such as open space, sewer and solid waste facilities, and the utilities needed to support county services.

On July 10, the board approved proceeding with the funding plan, authorizing Boesch to set up a county Infrastructure

Investment Committee to develop criteria for use in drafting the plan.

The plan is critical because Placer County had no choice but to reduce funding for infrastructure projects during the recession years. Now, it is time for us to make infrastructure investments a higher priority again – not a top priority, but a higher priority.

The funding plan will include a focus on infrastructure projects that will help the construction industry get moving again and generate jobs. Areas of particular interest for our economic development efforts include the Sunset Industrial Area between Rocklin, Roseville and Lincoln and the Placer County Government Center in North Auburn, a complex commonly known as the DeWitt Center.

Placer County's efforts to increase cost sharing with employees are another critical part of the drive to keep revenue and costs in balance. Employees now pick up larger shares of their pension and health insurance costs than they used to, and new hires receive fewer benefits under a two-tier system that will help the county make sure benefit costs are sustainable long term.

Placer County also is making progress in reducing its unfunded liability for medical, dental, vision and other benefits that generally are known as other post-employment benefits, or OPEB.

Under a plan approved by the board in 2006, the county placed $25 million in an interest-earning trust account over three budget cycles. It sets aside funds when new employees are hired to cover part of their projected OPEB costs and has helped reduce the unfunded liability through increased cost sharing with employees for health insurance. The County also joined the California Employer's Retiree Benefit Trust Fund operated by CalPERS, obtaining higher investment earnings than

it could get on its own.

The county is having success in another important area: trying new, innovative approaches to provide public services that are both cost-effective and high-quality. Health and Human Services is leading the way, using an entrepreneurial approach that maximizes the use of federal and state funding and contracts with private-sector partners to provide client services in many cases.

Placer County also is gearing up for another effort that will be critical in the coming years: succession planning. Many of our employees at all levels are at or nearing retirement, and the County needs to make sure our bench is deep enough for the change that is inevitable.

We are at a very important point in local government. Due to declining revenues and a shrinking employee base, we are not as capable as we once were in some areas. Looking forward, we have a chance to reorient priorities to meet changed public service needs. Public involvement will be critical and I ask for your help in moving our county forward.

Last but not least, my sincere thanks to everyone who chooses to participate in ensuring your local county government is as responsive and nimble as possible in the coming years.

Jennifer Montgomery is chairwoman of the Placer County Board of Supervisors.

Opinion: West Coast needs to

learn from Sandy

By Alexandra Le Tellier, Los Angeles Times

Watching super storm Sandy ravage New York and New Jersey made two things abundantly clear. It's time to stop double-guessing climate scientists, and it's time to start focusing on building a modern-day infrastructure to accommodate our climate-changed reality.

Of all the horror stories that played out in Sandy's path of destruction, one of the most shocking was the meltdown of two Manhattan hospitals – New York University Langone Medical Center and Bellevue Hospital – which not only suffered power outages but also couldn't rely on backup generators. At Bellevue Hospital, 17 million gallons of seawater collected in its basement, compromising the generators. Think about that. At both hospitals, critical-care patients had to be evacuated.

Piers Morgan used his CNN soapbox to take Alan Aviles, president of the New York City Health and Hospitals Corp., to task for facilities that were unprepared, jeopardizing patients' health and safety. He argued:

THEN AND NOW: Devastation from super storm Sandy

> I find it quite shameful that two of New York's major hospitals have suffered complete power outages, given the fact that there've been hurricanes before, from Irene onwards, which have threatened; that they're on the water, these hospitals; there must be an ongoing threat. And then it was a week to prepare for what everybody was saying was the biggest storm New York would ever see. […]
>
> But whichever way you explain this, it doesn't change the fact that you have got hundreds of patients, many critically ill, many mothers with newborn children, all being ferried on Monday night, for example, from NYU into the eye of the

> worst storm ever. I can't think of anything worse for a mother with a newborn child than to be ferried down nine flights of stairs by harassed nurses and then have to go out into a hurricane.
>
> It does beg the question, if this was to happen again next year, would you have a different system that didn't have, for example, pumps with oil in the basement, which then get drowned so much you can't use them? I mean, what are the lessons that get learned here so that mothers who may be coming into these hospitals next year don't have to worry that if there's another hurricane, they're going to be out in the middle of it? […]
>
> Is it not your job as the president of New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation to think the unthinkable? And isn't this just part of the unthinkable – in other words a major attack through water? You are based near the water there. It can hardly be that unthinkable. But it has come in and has affected your power system to the extent that you have to evacuate hundreds of people. That is part of your job, isn't it?

"It is very easy to make that judgment from a ringside seat," Aviles said by way of defense. True. But we still ought to listen to this critique and find answers to the questions this fiasco raised before the next big disaster, wherever it may hit.

That's especially true for us in California, where we have earthquake faults, nuclear power plants and the Pacific Ocean to contend with. And one place we can't cut corners: medical facilities.

In an op-ed that ran in 2011's *Los Angeles Times* opinion pages, Assemblywoman Bonnie Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, questioned the wisdom behind cutting annual maintenance funds to our state's three mobile hospitals, or "hospitals in a

box," which can be set up just about anywhere in case of emergency and are fully loaded: ventilators, respirators, antivirals, digital X-ray machines, oxygen concentration unit, hundreds of beds and separate emergency rooms, among other crucial amenities.

"California has about 73,000 acute-care beds among its 321 brick-and-mortar hospitals. A whopping 75 percent of those hospitals are in earthquake zones. State officials have identified nearly 600 separate hospital buildings that pose a real risk of collapse during a seismic event," wrote Lowenthal, who also warned that these field hospitals would be as good as useless if we don't spend the money – a little less than $2 million annually – needed to maintain them.

Sandy wreaked havoc on the East Coast, devastating people in New York and New Jersey. For some, there's no silver lining in sight. But for us, on the West Coast, we should use Sandy as a call to action to prepare for worst-case scenarios, and that includes making sure that we don't skimp on the most important things, like healthcare.