Opinion: A compromise for dogs at Upper Truckee Marsh

Publisher's note: ***This is an open letter to the staff and board of the California Tahoe Conservancy and for all those concerned about access to the Upper Truckee Marsh.***

By Anthony Cupaiuolo

Due to a ban by the California Tahoe Conservancy board, no dogs are allowed (leashed or otherwise) in the Upper Truckee Marsh through July 31. This three-month closure is the first of its kind for the marsh, and there is talk of banning dogs permanently from this area. This would be a tragic outcome for residents and visitors to this area.

The reason for the closure is to protect wildlife and nesting grounds in the marsh – a commendable goal. The marsh is a special area and it deserves special protection. I'm a volunteer videographer for Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, where my wife, Karen, is a board member and also a volunteer – so we're keenly aware of the needs of wildlife in our region.



People allowing dogs to run off-leash led to the ban of canines at Upper Truckee

Marsh.
Photo/LTN

Unfortunately, this closure does little to protect wildlife while punishing responsible dog owners. The board doesn't want dogs off-leash chasing wildlife and disturbing nesting grounds. Neither do we. But, dogs already aren't allowed off-leash in the meadow. So, what we have is an education and enforcement issue.

Additionally, it doesn't address other irresponsible behaviors that are harmful to wildlife, such as those who use the marsh to fly loud gas-powered radio-controlled planes. Or let their cats outside, free to stalk and kill small birds and animals. Or those who use the area as a late-night party spot. (I've even seen people drag some pretty big power generators out there for music.) And although the meadow is a great place to teach kids about wildlife, they can be pretty disruptive themselves – ever seen a 5 year old go running up to a bunch of ducks just to see them scatter? Again, education and enforcement (and more on both in a moment).

Currently, responsible dog owners like my family are unable to enjoy the beauty of our nearby treasure for three prime months of the year (and possibly permanently). My wife and I have a small child and my parents live next door. If we want to enjoy an off-pavement walk with our Lab (also a member of our family), we have to load up two cars and drive somewhere.

Yes, there are other areas dog owners can take their dogs for walks – but none is as beautiful or as accessible for young and old family members as this meadow. It's as if you were told you couldn't go to Kirkwood, but only Boreal on a powder day. Why should this beautiful area be reserved for just a few? This meadow should be open to everyone who respects it.

Clearly, denial of access is unfair. But there is another side – one with which I empathize. The residents who live on or

nearby the meadow’s access points have had to contend with disrespectful people who allow their dogs to roam freely and don’t pick up after them. They’ve had to deal with those who use the trails to access the beach for late night parties. This, also, is unfair (although not connected with the dog/wildlife issue).

There is a solution that I see as a middle ground. Last month, I had the opportunity to voice my concerns about the closure to Ray Lacey and Dana Dapolito, deputy director and associate environmental planner, respectively, for the Conservancy. During that conversation the idea of a permitting process emerged.

Although we didn’t cover the specifics, this is how it might work: Those who wish to walk their dogs (on a leash) would have to go the Conservancy’s office to get a permit to walk their dog in the meadow. During this process, they would learn about the sensitive nature of the marsh and the reasons why keeping dogs on leash are necessary. Those with permits would be able to walk their dogs in the meadow. If you are caught walking your dog in the meadow without a permit, even if it’s on leash, you would be fined. If you have a permit and you let your dog off-leash, you would be fined.

Once the word gets out about this process, there’s every reason to believe we can accomplish the goals of protecting the marsh while allowing access to those who are responsible and respectful of this local treasure. Of course, dog owners who want this area to be open to dogs off-leash will be disappointed – so might residents who live on the marsh who wish to keep this area as private as possible for themselves. But for the vast majority of us, this is a solution that works.

Anthony Cupaiuolo is an Al Tahoe area homeowner.

Opinion: When will California get serious about changing business climate?

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the May 8, 2011, Sacramento Bee.***

As far as the editors of *Chief Executive* magazine are concerned, California is beyond terrible. It's dead last among all 50 states for business climate. No one in his or her right mind would want to do business here.

The magazine, based in Greenwich, Conn., is not alone. Rankings by many supposedly reputable organizations place California at or close to the bottom in all manner of categories.

Business organizations and their allies in the Legislature wave them as they call for tax cuts, an end to suffocating regulation and curbs on nettlesome lawsuits.

The political left shrugs at these findings as the work of self-serving lobby groups. Often they are. An insurance industry-funded study that claims California is litigation-happy has no credibility. But when the Public Policy Institute of California offers a sober, nonpartisan and insightful analysis, policymakers ought to take notice.

In a report issued last month, the organization analyzed rankings by various groups and concludes that some raise legitimate points.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Hospice volunteers a critical component to health care

By Robert Orr

We all know it takes a very special person to be a Hospice worker, helping the terminally ill patients every day 24-hours-a-day.

Barton Health currently has 18 volunteers and more are needed in weeks to come. Barton's Hospice would not exist if it were not for our volunteers.



Robert Orr

Since 1996, Barton Hospice has been serving the terminally ill in South Lake Tahoe, Carson Valley and the surrounding areas. Their families and volunteers are a crucial part of the hospice team and are cherished by both staff and patients.

Hospice volunteers are very special people; giving of their time, hearts and compassion. They help the terminally ill and provide support and respite for the caregiver that is desperately needed.

Many Hospice volunteers have personally experienced Hospice

Care in their families or communities, giving them the empathy necessary to help other families when they are losing a loved one.

Hospice care is designed for patients who have a terminal diagnosis and a life expectancy of six months or less. Anyone interested in helping Barton Hospice will find being a Hospice volunteer personally rewarding and gratifying.

If you are interested in being a Hospice volunteer at the lake or in the valley, please call me at (530) 307.0288 or the Hospice office at (530) 543.5605.

Robert Orr is Barton Hospice's chaplain.

Opinion: Ho-hum about redistricting in N. Nevada

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the May 7, 2011, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

Democrats and Republicans and the Legislature released their competing redistricting plans over the past week and a half, and the biggest surprise for Northern Nevada residents was that there was no surprises at all.

Washoe County is going to lose a seat in the Senate – the one held for decades by the now-retired Sen. Bill Raggio and now kept warm by Sen. Greg Brower, who's already announced his plan to run for the vacant Northern Nevada seat in the U.S. House of Representatives – and a couple of seats in the Assembly.

But there was never any doubt of that once the lawmakers

rejected out of hand any discussion of increasing the number of districts in both Senate and Assembly because, it's said, of the cost.

Beyond some possible tinkering with the lines, Northern Nevadans no longer have a dog in this fight. The struggle will be among Southern Nevadans, who will have the vast majority of seats in the Legislature, as well as probably three of four in the House, when the next election rolls around.

Read the whole story

Opinion: How redevelopment destroyed South Lake Tahoe

By Steve Kubby

South Lake Tahoe Mayor Hal Cole recently described street maintenance as a "300-pound gorilla in the room," preying on South Lake Tahoe's streets, and nobody knows how to stop it. It's a beast that could take more than $300 million to fix, according to city staff estimates on bringing the roadways up to California's "complete street" standard.

The issue is "overwhelming," Mayor Cole said while admitting that the most common complaint he hears from residents is the state of the roads. Meanwhile, Councilman Tom Davis appears to have given up on ever fixing our streets, telling the *Tahoe Tribune* that the $300 million estimated repair bill for the streets is "an impossible goal."



Steve Kubby

“City council after city council has heard presentation after presentation regarding the state of disrepair of South Lake Tahoe’s roads,” reported the *Lake Tahoe News*, but each year funding is put off. Jim Marino, engineer with the city, told the council in 2009 that it would take $5.2 million a year for 25 to 30 years to get the streets up to par. The City Council responded by doing nothing. As pointed out in several stories that have appeared in the *Lake Tahoe News*, the deterioration of our roads has resulted in more runoff, which pollutes our pristine beaches and creates further loss of lake clarity.

The Tribune reported that road maintenance funding at the city has been unstable, at best, for more than 15 years. Some years street maintenance is not funded at all. So the big question is what happened 15 years ago that precipitated the end of funding for street repairs and maintenance. The answer is redevelopment.

Former Councilman Bill Crawford has said repeatedly, it was the council’s 1995 decision to subsidize redevelopment debt by giving up all of the hotel room taxes in the Heavenly Village redevelopment area, that set the table for the city’s economic woes for the last 15 years. The City Council voted to begin siphoning off $3 million to $4 million per year to keep the failed redevelopment project at Heavenly Village from drowning in red ink.

Two key players in all this were former mayors Hal Cole and Tom Davis, who actively promoted the development of Heavenly Village and who insist to this day that their redevelopment

scheme has helped, not hurt South Lake Tahoe. Yet most of the revenue promised by these two redevelopment promoters never materialized, resulting a staggering annual shortfall of millions of dollars that Cole and Davis “fixed” by voting in 1995 to raid the general fund. In doing so, it was these two men who disabled the city from being able to pay for street repairs.

On March 27, 2011, Mr. Crawford revealed in the *Lake Tahoe News*, “Sometime between the years 2000 and 2002 $7 million was filched from the city’s General Fund and given to the Redevelopment Agency. The City Council didn’t know about it until after it was disclosed. It was then called a loan.”

How $7 million was transferred from the General Fund to the Redevelopment Agency, without the knowledge or consent of the City Council, is still a mystery and deserves to be investigated, especially since that “loan” appears to be a fiction and may in fact be illegal.

Another redevelopment headache is the city garage, which loses more than $130,000 a year. Mr. Crawford questions the way the City Council dealt with this issue as well. “In 2002, bonds were sold to finance the city garage at 7 percent interest when the going rate for muni bonds was 4 percent. The garage is a millstone around the city’s neck and is one of the factors that has led to the city to nearly drown in debt,” said Mr. Crawford.

Since Mayor Cole considers the responsibility to maintain city streets to be “overwhelming” and Councilman Davis has described fixing our streets as, “an impossible goal,” it’s time for some new thinking to replace the failed leadership of the past 15 years.

One solution would be for the city to face reality and declare bankruptcy. That’s pretty drastic, but the most immediate result could be $3 million to $4 million per year in hotel tax

money going back into the general fund for road repairs and maintenance. Orange County declared bankruptcy and recovered. Clearly, the time has come for an honest look at our finances and the very real possibility that only through bankruptcy can the we ever hope to restore our broken streets and actually begin living within our means.

While it is true that the city's finances are audited each year, these audits are solely based upon "facts" presented by the city's own finance department. What is really needed is a forensic audit to expose the true scope of the fiscal debacle that has been dumped upon South Lake Tahoe in the name of redevelopment. It is time for the distinguished members of the El Dorado County Grand Jury to open a new investigation into the City Council and into the questionable activities of redevelopment promoters Hal Cole and Tom Davis.

Steve Kubby is a resident of South Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: Political games between South Tahoe and LTUSD

Publisher's note: ***This letter was first read into the record at the May 17, 2011, South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting.***

I thank the city manager, Mr. (Tony) O'Rourke, for his criticism of my remarks on the $250,000 that he favors giving to the school district. Clearly, I hit a nerve by saying the act is undisciplined. I stand by it.

It's ridiculous under the economic circumstances to consider financial aid to the school district.



Bill Crawford

The city manager's laundry list of my votes is twisted out of context for the most part. Half-truths are half lies, sins by omission. Also, how much time and money was spent on researching his list?

The city manager claims I sit on the sidelines throwing stones. There is an easy fix for that. Give me 15 minutes on the city's agenda on the subject of the relationship between the school district and city over past years.

And because of my past experience with four city managers, I have become a skeptic. All play politics and so at times they are not truthful when disclosing their agendas. Thus, I observe, deduce, and apply. In Mr. O'Rourke's case he seems too have a mean streak and has a thin skin. And as the kids say, that's not cool.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: A call for disclosure by the League

By Rochelle Nason

The League to Save Lake Tahoe has filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request with the Tahoe Regional

Planning Agency, asking it to release public documents regarding the expenditure of public funds. The recipient of those funds, South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman/TRPA member Claire Fortier, says the League's FOIA request is an "attempt at bullying", and an "attempt to discredit me".

What is going on here?

On April 13, 2011, the TRPA disclosed that in 2010, it had paid $9,681 to Fortier's company, Laren Inc. Wondering why TRPA would make payments to a political activist/researcher, the League reviewed copies of the economic disclosure forms that she had filed with TRPA to see if we could learn more.



Rochelle Nason

The payment from TRPA to Laren, and from Laren to Fortier did not appear on the form. We therefore wrote to Ms. Fortier and the agency, pointing out the omission and asking that she correct it before participating in any more of TRPA's meetings. On April 27, 2011, before participating in the TRPA's meeting on that date, Fortier indeed corrected her economic disclosure statement to show the payment to Laren. The corrected statement declared, "Laren Communications completed a project for the TRPA on the history of the agency in Jan[uary]2010."

That same day a story ran in the *Tahoe Daily Tribune* in which it was reported that: "According to both Fortier and TRPA spokesman Jeff Cowen, the planning agency paid Fortier the $9,681 for research on a 40th anniversary project. Fortier said the research revolved around the TRPA's pre-1980

history."

The League praised Fortier for the disclosure: "[t]he League is glad Claire has stepped up and done the right thing in disclosing her financial dealings with the TRPA. We are encouraging her to be proactive about contacting the Fair Political Practices Commission and making sure she has made all the disclosures required by state law as well."

We pointed out that: "We are still concerned with the question why TRPA would spend almost $10,000 for historical research on its 40th anniversary. All that information has been assembled repeatedly in the past, in connection with the 30th, 25th, 20th, and 10th anniversaries of the agency." We noted would be seeking the documentation on the project – and that is why we filed our FOIA request.

Why does Claire Fortier consider a request that a government entity release public documents relating to its expenditure of public funds to be an act of "bullying" against her? She asks, "Is this a pissing match or an unabashed attempt by the League to intimidate me?"

Well, it is neither one. It is what it is: a request for public documents about a matter of the public interest.

We encourage everyone with an interest in all that is going on between the city and the League – or in the broader issues of land-use and environmental planning in the Lake Tahoe Basin – to spend a few minutes viewing my presentation to the City Council on May 3, 2011.

You can find the presentation by moving the "slider" at the bottom of the video to 1:07.10 (1 hour, 7 minutes, 10 seconds into the meeting).

You will see that the League is *not* seeking to obstruct the economic development of the city of South Lake Tahoe when we try to assure that regional planning achieves environmental

goals, nor when we seek to enforce the laws that protect Lake Tahoe. We *do* believe that by working together, we can keep Tahoe's local communities sustainable – and that we can and we will Keep Tahoe Blue.

Rochelle Nason is the executive director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe, also known as Keep Tahoe Blue.

Opinion: Now is the time for solutions, not stones

By Tony O'Rourke

In response to Mr. (Bill) Crawford's May 12, 2011, opinion piece in the *Lake Tahoe News* I would like to set the record straight.

It was grossly misleading of Mr. Crawford to state, "the city manager of South Lake Tahoe will advise the City Council to donate $250,000 of city reserve funds to the school district for upgrading the football field at South Tahoe High School." Mr. Crawford further stated, "This is an example of undisciplined behavior by the city manager because the gift has nothing do with meeting the needs of the city."

First, the May 3 memorandum to the City Council on this matter clearly states that Dr. (Jim) Tarwater, superintendent of Lake Tahoe Unified School District, was scheduled to make a presentation requesting the City Council consider a contribution of $250,000 toward the Viking Stadium and softball field improvements. Nowhere in the memo am I, as city manager, or any other member of the city staff recommending

anything other than to hear Dr. Tarwater's presentation and consider his request. Furthermore, the item was postponed until June because the request required additional information and needed to be discussed in the broader context of the city's proposed five-year Capital Improvement Plan.


Tony O'Rourke

In Mr. Crawford's own words, "The school district should run the district and the city should run the city … *but there should be no free exchange of tax dollars*." (emphasis added). I find it incredulous that Mr. Crawford would suggest the notion of a potential partnership between the city and school district as ill-advised" and "undisciplined behavior," yet as a council member Mr. Crawford repeatedly supported a partnership between the city and school district as exhibited by the following:

• Voted multiple times to support the school district financially, most recently in 2010 to spend $52,913 for a South Lake Tahoe police officer to serve four days a week as a school resource officer at South Tahoe High School. The school district contributed $52,105 for this "financial partnership."

• Voted to support the expenditure of $28,000 for a land appraisal and master plan for a government center in partnership with the school district and El Dorado County.

• In 2009, voted to support the development and shared operating costs of a city-school district multipurpose room at South Tahoe High School.

• At the Feb. 6, 2007, City Council meeting, Mr. Crawford expressed his opinion of the importance of securing maintenance funding for the renovated athletic track and newly constructed soccer field at South Tahoe Middle School – the same track and soccer field for which the city had in 2006 contributed $270,000 to the school district to build. At the February 2007 meeting Mr. Crawford stated, “this renovated facility should be available for all of the community.” Now, Mr. Crawford criticizes simply the idea of considering the very kind of City-School District partnership he supported as a council member.

Mr. Crawford is correct, “The city can’t fix the streets.” During Mr. Crawford’s tenure as City Council member virtually nothing was done to invest in city streets. In fact, the city last adopted a Capital Improvement Program in 1999.

By comparison, the current City Council in less than 100 days of service has:

• Right-sized the city organization through department consolidations, layoffs and early retirements saving the South Lake Tahoe taxpayers $10.2 million over the next five years;

• Adopted a Strategic Plan that addresses and prioritizes the needs of the community for the next five years by focusing on Fiscal Sustainability, Economic Development, Improving the Built Environment, Improving Public Trust and Accountability, and Partnership Development;

• Adopted a five-year financial plan that eliminates a projected $17 million budget shortfall over the next five years by right-sizing the city organization to live within its means and investing $25 million in public roads, sidewalks, drainage, lighting and community facilities;

• Started developing the first Capital Improvement Plan since 1999 to improve streets, sidewalks, lights, bike paths and community facilities;

• Taken action to provide the public what the public has loudly indicated it wants, which includes better government, better streets and infrastructure, better facilities for youth and better partnerships among government agencies. In the December 2010 Citizen Survey, a mere 32 percent of residents indicated services for our youth were excellent or good and 81 percent rated community appearance and infrastructure as an essential or very important priority to address.

Ironically and unfortunately, when former Councilmember Crawford had the opportunity to put the city on a fiscally prudent and sustainable course as the current City Council has done, he chose to use over $5.2 million dollars in operating reserves in 2008, 2009 and 2010 largely for personnel costs to balance the city's budget rather than permanently right-sizing the city and investing in public infrastructure.

Mr. Crawford, please spare the public lectures on what is prudent or appropriate fiscal discipline. When Mr. Crawford had the opportunity to demonstrate fiscally prudent action, he chose to kick the can down the road.

Every citizen, every city employee, every City Council member in the wake of these financially challenging times must share part of the burden of saving our city. I publicly request Mr. Crawford to commit to finding constructive and positive solutions for our City and not merely sit on the sidelines and criticize those who are making the tough choices now, taking the heat now, for choices that could have been made years ago. These are times that require bold and innovative leadership, not carping from the bench.

Tony O'Rourke is city manager of South Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: Time to recognize EMS workers

To the community,

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Holidays and bad-weather days included. These are the times that paramedics and emergency medical technicians of the fire departments are on the job serving the communities we live in. Long shifts, extreme weather conditions and an ever-changing and unstable work environment make pre-hospital Emergency Medical Services truly a labor of love.

Monday marked the beginning of National EMS Week and presents an opportunity to honor the men and women who deliver pre-hospital 911 emergency medical care throughout the Lake Tahoe region and beyond. This vital service in our area is provided primarily by cross-trained multi-role emergency responders who are based at South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, Lake Valley Fire Protection District, and Tahoe-Douglas Fire Department. Over the last 20 plus years, the fire services have been re-tooled to be an all hazards responder including the provision of pre-hospital emergency medical care.

Fire service-based EMS providers are located, trained, and equipped to provide local communities with timely pre-hospital 91-1 emergency medical response and patient care. Pre-hospital emergency providers respond quickly, professionally, and compassionately in serving the community – and they do it everyday– 24/7.

California Tahoe Emergency Services Operations Authority (CTESOA) the EMS operations portion of Lake Valley Fire Protection District and South Lake Tahoe Fire Department has completed its first 10 years of providing reliable high quality 911 services to the South Shore community. Because of

this exceptional performance El Dorado County Department of Health has awarded CTESOA a new 5 to 10 year performance based contract to continue serving the local community.

National EMS Week is a time to pause and say thank you to the entire EMS Community, including Paramedics, Firefighter/EMTs and Dispatchers – our nation's emergency response professionals.

Bryan Pond, CalStar South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Imperative STHS improve athletic conditions

To the community,

As a coach of youth athletics at the elementary and middle school ages, for over 25 years, coaching Little League Baseball, Pop Warner Football, Bobby Sox Softball, Soccer and as a previous head coach of our local ski resort, Heavenly D-Team, I have had the pleasure to witness firsthand how important and instrumental athletic programs have benefited the development of the youth in our community.

As a member of several of these youth athletic organizations, board of directors and a full-time resident of South Lake Tahoe for the past 23 years, I have enjoyed watching the many benefits that these athletic programs have provided thousands of young boys and girls in our community during their very influential years.

The renovation of Viking Bowl to Viking Stadium will complement the recent additions to our local high school

campus which have been completed in recent years, and those that are currently under construction today. These projects are making South Tahoe High School a world class academic facility and hopefully it will soon be considered one of the best schools in our state.

The completion of the Viking Stadium renovation plan will not only provide a much needed addition to our local high school campus, it will in turn help promote the city of South Lake Tahoe as more than just a tourist destination.

The renovation of Viking Stadium will prevent many families who may be thinking of leaving our community, because of inferior school facilities, to stay in South Lake Tahoe and allow their children to complete their high school education here as opposed to the various schools in our neighboring communities which currently offer better school and sports facilities.

I unfortunately have seen firsthand many families leave our community and move to Minden, Gardnerville, Carson City, Reno and Sacramento partly because of the condition of the athletic facilities at South Tahoe High School. This new athletic field and stadium will help prevent additional families from moving “off the hill” and also will attract new families to our city and to call South Lake Tahoe their home.

The completion of this renovation project will provide revenue for our school district, our city and in turn provide much needed income to the many small business owners who are currently struggling to stay open. The more businesses that close and the more families that leave South Lake Tahoe, the less revenue this our city obtains.

This facility when completed will attract families and students who participate in other sports programs in neighboring towns. It will allow for other high schools, colleges and possibly professional sports team to come to

South Lake Tahoe and use this facility for high altitude training. The stadium could be rented for many different types of sports programs, activities and other events, and in turn bring much needed revenue to the many restaurants, motels and other businesses in our town who are struggling to stay afloat.

Athletics and academics go hand in hand. Athletics promote school and community spirit. For those that attended one of our two “Friday Night Lights” football games last fall, you already know the huge success this was for our high school and for the community of South Lake Tahoe.

If temporary lights on a field mostly covered in mud, without bathrooms in the near vicinity for its spectators, a proper snack bar, bleachers that are rotting and are a safety hazard and without simple access for the disabled, can attract the type of numbers that those two games did, the possibilities that this project when completed could do for our city and our community are incredible.

Over the past few months, many business owners and families have provided financial contributions to the Lake Tahoe Unified School District to assist with the completion of this project.

We have done so as we realize the wonderful impact that this sports facility will have on thousands of youth in the city of South Lake Tahoe for years to come. Creating a place where the students of South Tahoe High School can be proud, a place where the younger boys and girls in our town will look forward to playing sports as they grow up and to provide a school that they look forward to attending, will have immeasurable impact on them, their families and our entire community.

It is mine, the many families and children of South Lake Tahoe who currently play youth sports and the current and future student body of South Tahoe High School sincere hope, that the

city of South Lake Tahoe considers this proposal and helps fund and become a part of a project that is certain to benefit all of us who call South Lake Tahoe our home.

Tony Gooding, South Lake Tahoe coach, parent, business owner