

Opinion: Placer County wrong to oust supervisor from TRPA

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Jan. 6, 2011, Auburn Journal.*

A push to allow developers to “clean up” eyesores in Lake Tahoe has left a black mark on four of the five Placer County supervisors’ voting records.

Recently, four members of the board voted to oust Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency because she didn’t vote in step with other supervisors.

The issue at hand: allow developers to take over run-down buildings, clean them up and possibly make them bigger.

This is done through tourist-accommodation unit transfers. The transfers include hotel, motel and vacation rental rooms that developers can buy the rights to from existing projects in the Lake Tahoe area.

Supervisor Kirk Uhler said the board looks at the transfers as a way to encourage the retirement of old units that have no erosion controls and are causing problems with lake clarity.

The idea is a good one at first glance. Lake Tahoe is a magnet for outdoor recreation enthusiasts year-round and fixing up old motels helps make the jewel of the foothills shine even brighter.

But a problem surfaces when developers can take what was once a small motel and turn it into a much larger one. One consequence is more traffic in an area that is already fairly congested.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Time to do something about public transit

Publisher's note: *Gloria Hartoonian read this letter to the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Feb. 8, 2011. It is being reprinted with her permission.*

Good morning Mr. Mayor and City Council Members,

Developing an attractive and efficient public transportation plan is essential to the future of South Lake Tahoe. If we do not, 20 years from now it will be clear to all that we are still a 1950s kind of a place. The center of town will still be a four-lane interstate crowded with cars; and just as we do not have enough parking now, so then, we will not have enough parking either.

Mayor [Hal] Cole is right: you never can have enough parking.

Visitors and locals should always be able to drive their own cars. For one thing, in case of fire, people need to get out of harms way and the city does not have the resources to do this. But affordable, reliable and attractive public transportation as an option has got to be developed and sold to the public. Other tourist destinations have accomplished this – including delivering families with kids and all their stuff to where they want to be.

Where the center of town is located should be our choice – a place, for example like Ski Run Boulevard – with all the potential that's there. The center of town, as it is now, has been imposed upon us: it is Highway 50 with its millions of cars. Twenty years from now will it still be so?

I am encouraged by Mr. [Bruce] Grego and Ms. [Claire] Fortier's willingness to tackle this vexing problem because our future depends on radically changing the transportation scene as it has always been endured.

Gloria Hartoonian, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Glimmers of hope in Tahoe real estate market

By Joe Salcedo

2010 gave us a steady progress for the Lake Tahoe real estate market as units and volume increased significantly, 28 percent and 37 percent, respectively. It was a breath of fresh air from the suffocating 2009, where median home prices went down 24 percent.

So what do we make of this? Continue to proceed with caution. Units and volume are up, but home prices are still going down. If you hear us Realtors unrolling the red carpet and shooting glowing press releases – please don't mock – know that the last time we saw anything positive, Bear Sterns and Lehman Brothers were still listed in the stock exchange.

"The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function" – you will need this dear reader; as news media and real estate people will frustrate the daylights out of you (as you probably know by now), for they're peaceful when it's calm out to sea and bicker when the storm comes.



Joe Salcedo

But you can't depend on perpetual cynics either; those who seem to believe that they are smarter than the market. When it comes to the market, the curious observer wins. And don't worry, unlike the stock exchange where 10 percent weekly price fluctuations occur, in real estate you rarely get left behind; if you pay attention.

Historically, home prices increase at an average of 5 percent per year, and that doesn't happen overnight. Real estate markets fluctuate in a shape of an elongated "W" not a "V", so even if you miss the exact market bottom, consistent stronger home prices (two to three years) will nudge you that it's a good time to buy.

Any market recovery is led by an increased demand, because the number of buyers influences how seller's asking price is met. If buyers significantly outnumber sellers, they begin to offer full asking price, sometimes higher, as they bid against each other. This in effect gives other future seller's a guide, or as they call it, "comparable" on how to price their home. Also, the number of sellers or the lack of plays a great part in influencing what prices buyers are willing to settle for, so keep the listing inventory in check as well.

On the other hand, increasing home sales doesn't mean that prices won't go down any further. Take for example Washoe County; Reno has seen an increased demand since 2007 but home prices continue to go down. There are many reasons for this; mainly the number of foreclosures keeps pulling "comparables" down.

In Lake Tahoe, foreclosures are nowhere near as rampant compared to its neighboring cities in Northern Nevada; I hope it continues to be that way. In any case, the number of Lake Tahoe single-family homes improved 28 percent from 2009 and 62 percent for condos. This is a good start.

If you're thinking of buying or putting your home in the market; the best advice I can give you is to use market facts to furnish your intuition. Research and intuition are the best tools to help you make the best decision. Our job is to show you what's happening out there, because at the end of the day only you know what's best for you and your family.

Joe Salcedo regularly writes about the lake's short sale market and has recently launched Lake Tahoe Real Estate that focuses on Incline, Zephyr Cove and Glenbrook.

Opinion: Voters should have a say in public pensions

By David Crane

In his State of the State address, Gov. Jerry Brown said that "it would be unconscionable (for the Legislature) to tell the electors of this state that they have no right to decide whether it is better to (extend taxes) or to chop another \$12 billion out of schools, public safety, our universities and our system of caring for the most vulnerable." Surely most Californians would agree.

But taxes are just one side of the budget coin, the other being expenses. At the same time as they vote on taxes to help close the deficit, shouldn't voters also have a say about

costs that contribute to that deficit?

Voters now have some rights in that regard. The state can issue general obligation bonds only with their approval, and voters have determined by initiative that the state must prioritize spending on K-14 education.

But voters don't get a say over the largest expenditure by governments, which is employee compensation and benefits. Instead, that spending is determined through negotiations between labor, largely represented by public employee unions, and management, represented by the Legislature and the governor.

In the private sector, labor-management negotiations are generally at arm's length, with management representing shareholders, union leaders representing workers, and neither side exercising influence over the other. But not so in the public sector, where labor can and does exercise influence over management through political contributions and activities. The California Fair Political Practices Commission reports that public-employee labor unions are the largest contributors to political campaigns. As a result, the citizens bearing the costs really aren't at the table.

David Crane was an adviser to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and now lectures on public policy at Stanford University. He serves on the UC Board of Regents and the California High Speed Rail Authority.

Read the whole story

Worse, politicians can incur debt for employee retirement benefits without voter approval. That debt – now the largest of what is owed by the state – is created when politicians promise retirement benefits but don't fund them at all or fund them inadequately. The latter happens when public pension funds assume unrealistically high rates of return on investments. The more money assumed from investment earnings,

the less money need be set aside by politicians when they make the retirement promises. Enabled by that fiction, politicians can promise retirement benefits for a fraction of their real cost – until the earnings don't materialize. By then, those politicians are long gone and in their place is mountainous debt.

Opinion: Ski train idea worth pursuing

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Feb. 3, 2011, Sacramento Bee.*

Every weekend in the winter, thousands of skiers make the long drive up Interstate 80 to visit resorts near Soda Springs, Truckee and Tahoe.

Many of them undoubtedly notice the train tracks that parallel the interstate and wonder, "Wouldn't it be nice if I could take a train to the slopes?"

That's not practical now because of Amtrak's schedules, but moves are afoot to make a ski train a reality in future years. As The Bee's Ed Fletcher noted recently, the new CEO of Squaw Valley, Andy Wirth, has been talking to managers of other resorts about a ski train from the Bay Area to Truckee. He deserves credit for giving new life to an old idea. But make no mistake, the obstacles are formidable.

The biggest is the Sierra's mountainous terrain and steep grades that slow travel times. It can take five hours to get to the slopes by train from Sacramento, seven hours from the Bay Area. The only way to make a ski train work is to make

rail improvements that speed travel times. Choke points have to be identified and eliminated.

Read the whole story

Placerville school, community coping with loss

To the community,

School resumed today in the Placerville Union School District after the tragic loss of our dear friend and Schnell School principal, Sam LaCara.

We would like to thank our community and families for the outpouring of support for our staff and students – it is deeply appreciated.

At Schnell School, the return today was made successful through the efforts of an abundance of support staff who partnered with each of our teachers in support of both our teachers and our students. Every student heard the same message regarding this tragedy, followed by counselor and teacher led discussions. We feel this went very well, yet we encourage you to continue to have conversations with your children. The following message was read to all students:

“This is a very sad day at Schnell School. Our beloved principal, Mr. LaCara has died. It is hard to understand why horrible things happen. You will hear a lot of reasons for and discussions about this from your friends and families but nobody will have all of the answers. When events such as this happen, people react in many different ways. Today you will

see people who are very sad, upset, angry or shocked. We all need to practice patience and respect for each other. Some of us will want to have quiet time or time to talk with an adult. As adults, we are expected to have all of the answers and control our feelings. You will see a lot of adults who are also very sad today. We can take some time to talk about this now and if you would like, you can share some of your memories of Mr. LaCara. Mr. LaCara was a fantastic principal, wonderful friend and devoted husband and father. We will really miss him. Many of us will be feeling sad for a while. We will all help each other get through this and Schnell School will heal together. I will do my best to answer your questions but I may not have all the answers. “

Counselors were also available for staff and students at both Markham and Sierra schools.

Counseling and advice remains available for parents as well.

For those families who did not attend school today (Feb. 4), please know that we will continue to offer support services next week and thereafter, as needed.

A memorial service for Sam LaCara is scheduled Feb. 8 at 4pm at Green Valley Community Church, 3500 Missouri Flat Road, Placerville.

Information on the memorial service and memorial fund can be found on the Placerville Union School District website.

Mr. LaCara's family is requesting that, in lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Sam LaCara Memorial Fund at the El Dorado Community Foundation, P.O. Box 1388, Placerville, CA 95667

Again, we want to thank all of you for your support and dedication to the students, staff, and families of the Placerville Union School District.

Officers: No tolerance for drunken driving Super Bowl Sunday

The South Lake Tahoe Police Department is reminding football fans that if your Super Bowl celebration includes alcohol, make the right decision before kickoff and always have a designated sober driver.

This local message to Super Bowl fans joins with the national “Fans Don’t Let Fans Drive Drunk” message from the National Football League, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the HERO Campaign and Techniques for Effective Alcohol Management Coalition.

The El Dorado County Avoid the 6 DUI Task Force will be deploying special roving DUI patrols in several communities throughout the area looking to stop and arrest drivers who are impaired. These DUI patrols are in addition to regularly scheduled patrol officers, all looking for the tale-tell signs of an intoxicated driver behind the wheel.

Funding for the Avoid DUI Task Force is from the California Office of Traffic Safety.

The Fans Don’t Let Fans Drive Drunk message supports the league-wide designated-driver campaign called Responsibility Has Its Rewards. Celebrating its eighth season, the campaign

encourages fans to participate in designated-driver programs supported by beer and concessionaire companies at every NFL stadium nationwide. Throughout the season at all 31 NFL stadiums, more than 170,000 fans made the responsible decision by pledging to be designated drivers this season. Those fans now have a chance to earn the ultimate reward – a trip to Super Bowl XLV.

If you are hosting a Super Bowl party:

- Make sure all of your guests designate their sober drivers before kick-off or help arrange ride-sharing with other sober drivers
- Find unique ways to recognize the designated drivers at your party
- Give them a great spot to watch the game
- Whatever non-alcoholic beverage they are drinking, make sure their glass is always full
- Let them have the first pass at the buffet table
- Make sure their cars are easy to access when it is time to start driving people home
- Serve plenty of food
- Offer a variety of non-alcoholic choices like non-alcohol beers, soft drinks, juice, and water
- Serve one drink at a time and serve measured drinks
- Only serve alcohol to guests over 21 years of age
- Determine ahead of time when you'll stop serving alcohol, such as one hour before the end of the party or at the end of the third quarter of the game (just like NFL stadiums) and begin serving coffee and dessert

- Add the numbers of local cab companies into your phone so they are just one touch away
- Take appropriate steps to prevent anyone from driving while impaired
- Be prepared for guests to spend the night if an alternative way home is not available

If you are attending a Super Bowl party or watching at a sports bar or restaurant:

- Designate your sober driver before the party begins and leave your car keys at home if you plan to drink
- Find unique ways to recognize the designated drivers when you are out at a bar or restaurant
- Offer to be the designated driver the next time you go out
- Cover the cost for parking or even pay for a tank of gas
- Whatever non-alcoholic beverage they are drinking, make sure their glass is always full
- Pick up the tab for their food and drink
- Before you go out, add the numbers for local cab companies in your cell phone so if you find yourself in need of a ride, it is just one touch away
- Avoid drinking too much alcohol too fast. Pace yourself—eat enough food, take breaks and alternate with non-alcoholic drinks.
- Take appropriate steps to prevent anyone from driving while impaired. Remember, Fans Don't Let Fans Drive Drunk.
- Always buckle up – it's your best defense on the road.

– South Lake Tahoe Police Department

Opinion: Chipping away at community colleges

By George Skelton, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO — California's community colleges always have been among the best bargains in America. But too often these days that's like saying land's cheap on Mars.

Price doesn't matter much if the product isn't available.

Like a lot of institutions that rely on tax dollars, California's community college system has been hit hard. And that means students suffer.

They're getting less for more.

Gov. Jerry Brown is proposing to increase student fees by \$10 per unit, from \$26 to \$36. That would raise \$110 million to partly offset a \$400-million state funding cut Brown advocates for community colleges, leaving them with \$3.6 billion in state money, a 10% trim.

The governor essentially wants to shift that \$400 million to K-12 schools. They're more popular with the public, and their biggest union — the California Teachers Assn. — is arguably the most powerful lobby in Sacramento.

Brown's political strategy is simple: He's protecting K-12 schools from more whacks for now. But he's warning that K-12 cuts will resume if voters don't approve his proposed extension of temporary tax hikes in June. The teachers union presumably will be highly motivated to help bankroll his ballot campaign if the Legislature allows the special election.

Read the whole story

Clarification: Santiago explains Board of Supes chairmanship

Lake Tahoe News would like to clarify misinformation it posted recently about El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago.

Santiago is no longer chair of the Board of Supervisors based on the regular rotation of having the position for one year. Although she phrased it in a different manner while notifying the California Tahoe Conservancy board, of which she is a member, she has told *Lake Tahoe News* she regrets how she worded things at that meeting.

Santiago is chair of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board. Each jurisdiction around the lake has a representative to this board, usually an elected official.

Lake Tahoe News regrets writing any misinformation and has removed the original story.

ZCES principal encourages

balanced meals at lunch

By Nancy Cauley

This school year, I've committed to having a higher visibility with the students and parents. I make it a point to get outside and greet students as they arrive at school and again in the afternoon as they leave. It's great to see you parents as you deliver or pick up your children.

Similarly, I spend every day I'm on campus in the lunchroom. I enjoy this part of the day because I can check in on the students, ask how they're doing, and make sure they eat their lunch whether it's "brown bag" or a cafeteria meal. In that vein, I want you to know that I make every effort to have your children eat all of their lunch. Often, they've devoured the chips and chocolate bar, but have left the sandwich behind. I commonly tell students to eat their sandwich before the treats.

At times, after discovering that a student has not eaten the "meat and potatoes" part of their lunch, I will instruct them to return to the table to finish even after they've been dismissed to go back to class. Children can't function properly in the classroom on a bag of chips and a Jell-O snack; and frankly, neither could I – believe me, I've tried and it's not pretty.

I also extend this policy to the snacks sold in the cafeteria twice a week for grades 4-6. Students are not permitted to purchase snacks unless they've eaten the protein part of their lunch and have finished their milk. Quite honestly, I don't endorse the snacks sold in the cafeteria because they are generally unhealthy – over-processed and full of sugar and fat – which is why I am a stickler on whether or not a child is allowed to buy a snack, especially if they didn't eat their meal.

Trust me, I love sweets and certainly think that a balanced diet can include a little "something extra" in the way of treats, but I also know that growing bodies need protein and good carbohydrates. I hope you understand my desire to ensure that each child at ZCES consumes a healthy, tasty lunch.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call the office or speak to me directly.

Nancy Cauley is principal of Zephyr Cove Elementary School.