

North Tahoe Citizen Action Alliance

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Update on Kings Beach Commercial Core Improvement Project

When will the residential “traffic calming measures”, the additional parking lots, the sidewalks, and the single-lane roundabouts be installed in Kings Beach? Placer County’s Department of Public Works director Ken Grehm stated in public meetings many times that “*the project would be installed in two years (whereas the four lane alternative would take three years) and cost less than the four lane alternative.*” The project was approved by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) in January 2010, so according to the promises made it should be about done.

The latest word from Placer County was expressed by Jennifer Merchant of the CEO’s Office as a correction to the timeline of the Tahoe Transportation District’s Projects List. The new date is 2015 “depending on financing.” That is six years after approval. The project is significantly over budget, and outside funding may not be available at all.

The National Main Street Program literature suggests avoiding “grand schemes” as an answer to responsible “from the ground up” redevelopment of a downtown. This “grand scheme” appears to only keep numerous full-time government workers and their consultants on the public payroll.



Paradox of Intensification

Webster defines paradox as “*a statement which is self-contradictory and false, though it may seem true or clever.*” The TRPA and Placer County continue to push for greater densities of redevelopment in line with their “new urbanism” vision. Boulder Bay intensifies by 300% the density of existing units (from 120 to 360). Domus affordable housing on highway 28 in Kings Beach triples the density on that parcel. The Homewood project proposes to intensify densities from none today to 325 units plus new commercial. Placer County’s proposed Kings Beach Town Center project will more than triple existing commercial floor area and residential units. All these projects increase densities by three-times and offer mobility options to reduce dependency on the automobile. Is that all? Or so the theory says.

The paradox arises from the fact of increased population and that the actual reductions of vehicle use are a “weak” force, from only 4% to 8%. But a tripling of densities has a much stronger force of increasing the number people with vehicles that adds to the number of trips and local traffic counts.

While there is some truth to “reduced dependency on the auto,” intensification of densities overwhelms the savings of vehicle trips. An accurate analogy is the sale pitch that you can save money by buying an item, and you can save more by buying more. The amount saved is only a small portion of the expenditure that must be made first. Buying is not how to save money. Intensifying the densities is not how to reduce vehicles on the roadways.



This paradox has been researched, studied deeply, and written about by Steve Melia (et.al) in “The Paradox of Intensification.” Dr. Melia writes, “The evidence suggests that urban intensification tends to increase concentrations of traffic in those areas where it is practiced.” Portland, Oregon’s effort implementing “smart growth” policies comprises some of the extensive evidence in the field. Melia further concludes “In light of this, it may seem strange that some writers have advocated urban intensification as a means of reducing the negative externalities of car use.” We have our fair share of promoters for the resort development model who continue to ignore the paradox, and even produce traffic studies to show virtually no increase in traffic. The people aren’t buying it.

The TRPA and Placer County seem to forget, as they continue to intensify development or urbanize the North and West Shores with “new urbanism” principles, that they approved a significant reduction of Highway 28 capacity in Kings Beach. So the paradox will be accelerated and compounded by congestion that doesn’t exist today. The four lanes will be reduced to two through lanes, and they are still pushing intensification of densities.

How much longer can the public trust of local government officials and the TRPA endure this obviously self-contradictory path for Lake Tahoe, that is defined as an Outstanding National Resource Water? It’s only a matter of time before the reality of the paradox coupled with reducing roadway capacity is exposed as a corrupt and failed policy on Tahoe’s North Shore. How much in public expenditures have been wasted on this “grand scheme?”

Homewood Mountain Resort

From a different perspective Homewood Mountain Resort (HMR) was purchased at the height of the real estate bubble. If one pays too much on the market upside there is no guarantee the investment will be fully recovered. How many homeowners have experienced falling prices and had to adjust to the “market.” Instead, HMR followed the resort development playbook for the scale necessary to make it financially work out with the help of public entitlements and direct subsidies by public agencies.

Local government, the TRPA, and state level political influence the cronies are about to overdevelop a parcel (increasing coverage from about 6 acres to 35 acres) on the West Shore. Some locals think this development will save the Homewood Ski Resort, but there is no guarantee how long the owner would operate winter skiing at a loss. Would you? So it’s all about getting the

development permit at the necessary scale to generate sufficient profits, and then dealing with the degradation to the commons later.

TRPA continues on the path to codify the Community Enhancement Program (CEP) vision and standards (as with Boulder Bay) into the Regional Plan Update to create a monopoly for resort developers. The local businesses are secondary to the big developments and entirely dispensable. The problem is that the grand scheme of these large niche projects will not reduce traffic, but increase it substantially causing many other consequences that stress environmental thresholds.

Upcoming Events/Key Dates

Agendas for TRPA Governing Board and APC, and also Placer County BOS are not available until a few days before the meeting. Therefore, it is difficult to provide a meaningful emphasis to the meetings. Other meetings/events not shown here, or changes, will be announced by email.

November 2, Wednesday	NLTRA Board Meeting	8:30 am, TCPUD Board Room
November 8, Tuesday	NTPUD Board Meeting	9 am, NTEC, Kings Beach
November 9, Wednesday	TRPA APC Meeting	9:30 am, TRPA Stateline Office
November 10, Thursday	NTRAC Meeting	6 pm, NTEC Kings Beach
November 16, Wednesday	NTPUD Board Meeting	6 pm, TCPUD Board Room
November 18, Friday	TCPUD Board Meeting	8:30 am, TCPUD Board Room
November 16, Wednesday	TRPA Governing Board	9:30 am, TRPA Stateline Office
December 7, Wednesday	TRPA APC Meeting	9:30 am, TRPA Stateline Office
December 14, Wednesday	TRPA Governing Board	9:30 am, Granlibakken, TC
December 15, Thursday	TRPA Governing Board	9:30 TRPA Stateline Office

TRPA – Tahoe Regional Planning Agency
 NLTRA – North Lake Tahoe Resort Association
 TCPUD – Tahoe City Public Utility District
 NTEC – North Tahoe Event Center
 BOS – Placer County Board of Supervisors

APC – Advisory Planning Commission
 NTPUD – North Tahoe Public Utility District
 NTFPD – North Tahoe Fire Protection District
 NTRAC- North Tahoe Regional Advisory Council

“The body politic, like the human body, begins to die from its birth, and bears in itself the causes of its destruction.”..... Jean Jacques Rousseau, 1762

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The North Tahoe Citizen Action Alliance (NTCAA) seeks to provide an ongoing voice for ordinary citizens. Planning the future of our communities and providing for communication and education on key issues affecting our communities is of prime importance. We serve the North Lake Tahoe area from Kings Beach to Tahoma. NTCAA is a tax-exempt California Public Benefit Nonprofit Corporation formed in May 2007, staffed by community volunteers. Membership is limited to those who subscribe to the NTCAA Goals and Objectives and are willing to participate in the organization's activities.