

# North Tahoe Citizen Action Alliance

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*Jerry Wotel, Newsletter Editor*

## **NTCAA Newsletter – October, 2009**

### **TRPA Continues SBC Vision**

John Singlaub was the Executive Director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) since January 2004 where he established a context for re-visioning the existing TRPA Regional Plan. Since 2005 he also served on the Board of Directors of the Sierra Business Council (SBC) and embedded their “new urbanism” language into the proposed New Regional Plan. The image of “high-density, compact, mixed use, transit-oriented, and transect zoning” development has appropriate applications, but Lake Tahoe is more an anomaly than a simple textbook application. We all know the vast differences between South Lake Tahoe and the North/West Shores, yet TRPA is attempting to apply this vision to the whole Lake as if it is one homogenous community.

Joanne Marchetta was Chief Legal Counsel for TRPA under John Singlaub, and was appointed Executive Director in March 2009. Six months after retiring from TRPA John Singlaub took the job of Executive Director of SBC, returning to the bubble of hi-density vertical growth promoters. In a recent interview published in Moonshine Ink, John Singlaub said, “My successor, Joanne Marchetta, is carrying on the good things we started.” That does seem to be the case.

Perhaps the most disturbing approach by Joanne Marchetta was delineated at the October 13, 2009 Washoe County Commissioner meeting where she introduced herself and presented her view on the history of Lake Tahoe and the TRPA. After promoting her foundation of her “vision” to save Lake Tahoe (which is the SBC model of development) she said, “There are some who will try to stop us (TRPA) as they are now. As you already know land use planning and project approvals have become what I call ‘blood sport.’”



NTCAA doubts that anyone wants to stop the preservation of Lake Tahoe, and to characterize any opposition to the SBC inspired vision as trying to “stop us” from saving Lake Tahoe is simply disingenuous. TRPA produced the Community Enhancement Program (CEP) under John Singlaub’s tenure that incentivized large projects in the mold of South Lake Tahoe for the North (Boulder Bay) and West (Home-wood Mountain Resort) Shores. There was no consideration given to scale, and no definitive technically viable water quality gains beyond the individual parcel. The cumulative impacts to the environmental thresholds and traffic have been ignored or at best downplayed, for the sake of this “vision.” Marchetta’s presentation sounded more like an appeal to the emotions to support TRPA/SBC’s crusade, or “vision”, regardless of the scale and environmental consequences.

What Singlaub, and now Marchetta, have succeeded in doing is uniting thousands of citizens who want reasonably scaled redevelopment, equitable treatment by TRPA, and a fully accountable formulation of public policy for the Regional Plan Update. Citizens don't want the blind application of SBC driven rhetoric to the North and West Shores of Lake Tahoe.

### **“Recap & Set the Stage: RPU EIS”**

At last month's TRPA Board meeting the Executive Director announced three “Action Alternatives” that frame the choice of alternatives for the New Regional Plan. They are as follows:

- Alternative 2: Staff proposed hybrid based Forum & Place-Based Planning vision and values.
- Alternative 3: Continues and intensifies today's land use pattern; combines incentives with regulation to achieve environmental gains.
- Alternative 4: Contracts and condenses today's land use patterns; more stringent regulation for environmental gains

It is interesting to note that Alternative 2 is the TRPA Staff preferred vision that represents the legacy of John Singlaub, the Sierra Business Council, Regional Planning Partners, and is defined by “new urbanism” language. Alternative 3 intensifies today's land use patterns, while Alternative 4 contracts and condenses today's land use patterns. The failure of today's land use patterns has been a consistent attack by Alternative 2 proponents, to justify their “vision”. These are alternative choices designed to make Alternative 2 look like the only reasonable choice. Where is the imagination to reformulate these alternatives to learn from the problems of the existing Regional Plan, ratcheting back the stringency of regulation, and then incorporate incentives for BMP's and appropriately scaled redevelopment?



### **Confusing the Prescription with the Goal**

A keen observation was made by former TRPA Board member Jim Galloway (he has a doctorate in physics) prior to his recent retirement as Washoe County Commissioner. During the discussions of the New Regional Plan Update status he pointed out to staff that they were confusing the prescription with the goal. The goals of TRPA are clear, to set and maintain the environmental thresholds while providing opportunities for orderly growth and development. These goals are intentionally abstract, providing direction without prescribing a specific solution. The “how to” achieve the goals may involve targets like the thresholds, but how to combine threshold attainment with providing opportunities for orderly growth begs for a prescription.

The “vision” of the CEP's is one remedy to address the goals, but is certainly not the only way. The confusion arises from the assumption that the CEP's are the goal, so that all resources must be brought

to bear in pushing it through. TRPA staff launched this approach under John Singlaub bringing in all the local jurisdictions to rally behind the CEP's. The CEP's as a goal require the development of an advocacy position supported by appealing rhetoric that sells the idea as the answer to all of Tahoe's problems.

The CEP's will create open space, remove the fines from entering the Lake, and revitalize all the communities; in short, be the panacea for TRPA, the Lake, and all communities, by degrading the opposition, ignoring the collateral consequences, and focusing the discussion only on the benefits. If one opposes the CEP's are you opposing the goals? You can't be, because you are opposing a prescription, one of many alternatives to move toward achieving the goals.

The CEP's are only a prescription that must be evaluated thoroughly for accuracy of claims and possible side effects. That evaluation has been evident in public meetings for more than a year. But the TRPA staff has been acting as though the CEP's are the goal. This confusion has not been good for the public debate that formulates public policy. We need to get it back on right track.

### **Scientific Reasoning Applied to Public Policy Issues**

Mike Robinson, a professor of secondary science education at the University of Nevada, Reno, recently published an article about scientific reasoning and how it may clarify and shed light on publicly debated issues of the day. What better place than the issues here at Lake Tahoe.

Of the three parts of a science education (content, process skills, thinking skills) the most important is thinking skills; that is, "how individuals go about identifying, understanding, and solving problems." The first and most fundamental assumption is that individuals try to remain "impartial and genuinely seek understanding and truth." While this may seem contrary to human nature, Robinson insists that the process produces conclusions based on the evidence collected. Another way to look at it is to "go where the evidence takes you, not where you want it to go based on your ideology or preference."



He then applies these thinking skills to our democratic society, believing that citizens will do what is right if they have credible evidence that leads to unbiased understanding. And of course this assumes what we rarely see at Tahoe, "that individuals will put aside personal interests if they understand they are incorrect."

His conclusion could very well describe what most of us observe in the public policy debate at Lake Tahoe, "**When evidence debunks lies and deceptions, but people continue to adhere to them, it may indicate people are not fully informed, are not intellectually capable of understanding complex problems, or have personal interests they do not want to give up regardless of evidence or truth.**"

What can be done to maintain a more scientific and credible line of reasoning about public policy issues at Lake Tahoe? Begin with the facts and evidence, carefully qualified, checked, and subject to peer review. Then identification of personal interests such as direct and indirect financial, job or position status, or affiliation with a point of view due to friendship or loyalty. While everyone is entitled to their

opinion, distinguishing well qualified facts and evidence from personal opinion in public debate is essential for seeking understanding and truth.

**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 3, Tuesday	Placer County BOS Mtg.	8:30 am, Auburn
November 4, Wednesday	NLTRA Board Meeting	8:30 am, TCPUD Board Room
November 12, Thursday	NTRAC Meeting	6 pm, NTEC, Kings Beach
November 10, Tuesday	NTPUD Board Meeting	10 am, NTEC, Kings Beach
November 12, Thursday	TRPA APC Meeting	9:30 am, TRPA Stateline Office
November 17, Tuesday	Placer County BOS Meeting	8:30 am, Auburn
November 18, Wednesday	NTFPD Board Meeting	6 pm, TCPUD Board Room
November 18, Wednesday	TRPA Governing Board	9:30 am, Chateau, Incline Village
November 20, Friday	TCPUD Board Meeting	8:30 am, TCPUD Board Room
December 2, Wednesday	NLTRA Board Meeting	8:30 am, TCPUD Board Room
December 8, Tuesday	Placer County BOS Mtg.	8:30 am, Auburn
December 8, Tuesday	NTPUD Board Meeting	10 am, NTEC, Kings Beach
December 9, Wednesday	TRPA APC Meeting	9:30 am, TRPA Stateline Office
December 10, Thursday	NTRAC Meeting	6 pm, NTEC, Kings Beach
December 16, Wednesday	NTFPD Board Meeting	6 pm, TCPUD Board Room
December 16, Wednesday	TRPA Governing Board	9:30 am, TRPA Stateline Office
December 18, Friday	TCPUD Board Meeting	8:30 am, TCPUD Board Room

TRPA – Tahoe Regional Planning Agency  
 NLTRA – North Lake Tahoe Resort Association  
 TCPUD – Tahoe City Public Utility District  
 NTEC – North Tahoe Event Center (NTCC)  
 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

***“Question with boldness”*** .....Thomas Jefferson

***“Hold to the truth”*** .....George Washington

***“Speak without fear”*** .....Martin Luther King Jr.