

TAHOE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY

128 Market Street
Stateline, Nevada
www.trpa.org

P.O. Box 5310
Stateline, NV 89449-5310

(775) 588-4547
Fax (775) 588-4527
Email: trpa@trpa.org

Community Enhancement Program Looks Forward With Smart Growth Principles

By John Singlaub, TRPA Executive Director

Over the last 20 years, TRPA has worked to stop runaway development and focus more on improving the built environment that already exists at Lake Tahoe. Since nearly 90 percent of all buildings you see around the Tahoe Basin were built before our current regional plan was adopted in the 1980s, we have a great deal of catching up to do. It's no secret that when you look around the lake, the natural beauty far exceeds the look and feel of the buildings around us. And most of the older buildings at Lake Tahoe have no conservation measures in place and have wall-to-wall asphalt which causes erosion and runoff.

Commons Beach, the sidewalk improvement project in Tahoe City and redevelopment in South Lake Tahoe are notable examples of what can be achieved if we fix what's here. But there is much more we can do to improve and revitalize our downtown areas and transform them into vibrant, interesting gathering places that better reflect the vision community members have for the future.

In the series of planning workshops held around the Tahoe Basin last year, we received a great deal of input from Tahoe residents of what our communities should look and feel like over the next 20 years. People said they wanted each community center around the lake to be unique and beautiful. Each community is interested in creating walkable town centers with affordable housing, office and retail space mixed together and with greater access to public transportation. These would be a different style and scale consistent with the different communities' character around the lake.

With smart-growth principles and the wishes of the communities in mind, TRPA and local agencies created the Community Enhancement Program (CEP) as an integral part of our ongoing Pathway process to update the 20-year Regional Plan.

To provide the kind of projects the community desires, TRPA may need to update some of its rules and ordinances, such as those limiting density and building height around commercial centers. In turn, local jurisdictions are looking at updating their parking restrictions associated with new projects. And we must do all of this while still creating projects that generate a net benefit for the environment. TRPA will test all of this in coming months through the CEP, which contains incentives for developers with projects that fit the bill.

We started accepting applications for the CEP in August and will continue until late October. Those projects chosen will be thoroughly reviewed in a fast-tracked, streamlined process.

Smart growth is needed in the Tahoe Basin and TRPA is required by law to work toward better transportation with less reliance on the automobile. We feel that CEP projects will lead the way as we move forward with the Lake Tahoe Regional Plan Update. A new Regional Plan for the Basin is scheduled for approval October 2008 and will reflect the three years of public input we've gathered as part the Pathway process. Smart growth principles and transit-oriented projects will be a significant focus of the updated plan. The CEP is intended to inform TRPA and local jurisdictions what needs to change to move us forward.

The CEP is front-loaded to shape projects early in the design stages to ensure they meet the environmental criteria and the needs of the community. The hope is that these projects, in turn, will be catalysts for further upgrades to our community centers, transit connections and neighborhoods and inform the community plan update process that will begin in 2009. We expect to learn how to encourage "net gain" results from proposed community reinvestment and redevelopment activities. By net gain, we mean achieving improvements that benefit the built and natural environments as well as the community's well being and the local economy.

Let me state clearly, the CEP is not a code avoidance program. Case studies have shown that there are certain elements of our Code of Ordinances that limit the kind of results we want. Projects that are selected will be reviewed under current rules and must achieve high standards.

The CEP is also part of my commitment to improving the TRPA. This agency and the unique communities that make up the Tahoe Basin are facing many additional challenges and opportunities. For example, forest fuels reduction and creating defensible space is highly important to TRPA and we are working with local fire agencies and the bi-state fire commission to create new solutions. Keeping our communities safe, sustainable, and vibrant places is just as important as protecting the natural environment.

For more information about the Community Enhancement Program, contact Brenda Hunt at TRPA. bhunt@trpa.org or call 775-589-5225. Check TRPA's web site at www.trpa.org for additional details.