

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

In Lake Tahoe, Smart Growth Takes on New Meaning

By John Singlaub, Executive Director

As we move forward with TRPA's new Regional Plan, we have been careful to listen to scientists, urban planners, and the citizens both inside and out of the Tahoe Basin to craft a vision of our future that we can attain along with our environmental threshold standards.

Creating compact, high-density, transit-oriented communities with a healthy mix of land uses, an array of housing types and a sense of "place" is more than just an abstract concept now. Communities across the nation have done so with great success, including environmental, social and economic benefits that have reinvigorated Main Street USA. Our air and water are cleaner now thanks to both greater environmental controls and technological achievements over the past several decades.

In Tahoe, land use policies, restoration projects implemented as part of the Environmental Improvement Program and an overall better scientific understanding of how our actions affect Lake clarity have resulted in encouraging environmental progress. For the first time in a generation, scientists can say with certainty that the decline in Lake clarity is slowing down. Our work appears to have produced some positive results.

Scientists have also told us that the largest single source of contaminants is in our urban core areas and our road systems, two key areas that we need to focus on as we take our efforts to the next level. Next year, our hope is to adopt and implement new land use policies that will embrace the same smart growth principles seen in more urban areas, but adapted to the small scale and character of our Lake Tahoe communities. What's interesting about this concept is that by increasing density and clustering homes and businesses, we can bring about environmental benefits by reducing land coverage while making our communities more bike and pedestrian-friendly.

This will not only help us reduce the amount of private automobile use in the Basin, as the Bi-State Compact requires TRPA to do, but will also address the

emerging issues of climate change and energy efficiency into the way we design communities and new buildings. Concentrated focus on redevelopment projects in eight or nine urban core areas around the Lake will also allow us to continue partnering with the private sector to complete important Environmental Improvement Program projects that will reduce the amount of contaminants entering the Lake. The first 10 years of the EIP showed us that public-private partnerships are an effective way to leverage environmental net gains that we need to restore and preserve Lake Tahoe. With research showing us that the vast majority of contaminants affecting lake clarity come from urban areas, focusing our efforts in this way will revitalize our communities while correcting the land use mistakes of the past.

It makes good common sense that creating a community where you can walk and bike to and from work and play enhances our quality of life as well as the environment. That's why this concept is central to the update of the TRPA Regional Plan. Moving the concept from vision to reality is the next step in the process – that's where public-private partnerships are essential.

Proposed redevelopment projects in Crystal Bay, Kings Beach, and South Lake Tahoe at the "Y" will help inform us how best to put these ideas to practice. We expect to see significant environmental gain from these projects, along with the desperately needed clean-up of our built environment that will make our communities stronger and more livable. When we see completed environmental analyses and these projects move out of the "concept" phase, we will be able to quantify these environmental benefits. As the pieces come together with the updated Lake Tahoe Regional Plan and the updated Environmental Improvement Program, we expect to also deliver what the more than 2,000 people who have participated in place-based planning workshops around the Lake have relayed to us that they want: compact, transit- and pedestrian-friendly town centers that can serve as community gathering places.

If we apply these concepts to the unique set of conditions we have in Tahoe, we can revitalize our communities, deliver redevelopment projects that are appropriate for their surroundings, and benefit the Lake we all care so much about all at once. With clarity in mind, this will be our focus moving forward.

Mark your calendars for October 28 and 29: TRPA will be hosting evening workshops on both the north and south shores to talk about the Regional Plan update in more detail and how you can help us turn our plans into action.

- John Singlaub is Executive Director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. For more information, visit www.trpa.org.