



Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board
Regional Plan Implementation Committee
128 Market St.
Stateline, NV 89449

September 22, 2015

Subject: Placer County Tahoe Basin Area Plan and Tahoe City Lodge Project, Discussion and Possible Direction on Alternatives to be included within the Environmental Impact Statement/Report

Dear Members of the Regional Plan Implementation Committee:

The Friends of the West Shore (FOWS) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments regarding the Placer County Tahoe Basin Area Plan (TBAP) subject noted above. We appreciate the efforts of Placer County and TRPA staff to develop alternatives for your consideration. The following summarizes FOWS' concerns related to the proposed alternatives in the staff report:

- Inclusion of the Tahoe City Lodge pilot project in the Area Plan's EIR/S is inappropriate and the mix of various alternatives for the TBAP and Tahoe City Lodge Project will make an already complex and difficult public process even more confusing;
- The range of action alternatives is too narrow because they only encompass variations of the RPU's Town Center approach for Tahoe City and Kings Beach and exclude considerations of minor changes to existing Community Plans and Plan Area Statements; and
- All action alternatives include maximum increases in the allowable density in Tahoe City and Kings Beach (in other words, there is no 'middle ground' between the existing Community Plans and the proposed Action Alternatives).

FOWS recommends the following changes, which fall within the scope of our NOP comments:¹

- The Tahoe City Lodge Project should be removed from the TBAP alternatives and evaluated separately from the TBAP, thereby allowing the *plan* for Tahoe City to guide future *projects* - not the other way around;
- Action alternatives should include options for less density and other considerations in Town Centers;
- Action alternatives should include additional protections for ridgelines, nearshore areas, and other environmental resources; and
- Changes to height limits and other requirements within the North Stateline "Town Center" should not be considered, since Placer County is not proposing that the Town Center zoning 'incentives' be addressed at this time.

We herein incorporate by reference comments submitted by Ellie Waller. We would be happy to meet with you to discuss our concerns. Please feel free to contact Jennifer Quashnick at jqtahoe@sbcglobal.net if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Susan Gearhart,
President

Jennifer Quashnick,
Conservation Consultant

¹ <http://friendswestshore.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/FOWS-TASC-comments-on-Placer-NOP-Area-Plan-7.31.2015-w-att.pdf>

Public Process and Inclusion of the Tahoe City Lodge Pilot Project:

The 2015 TBAP Notice of Preparation (NOP) states the Area Plan review (including the Town Centers in Tahoe City and Kings Beach) and the Kings Beach Town Center Design Concept will be evaluated at the program-level,² while the Tahoe City Lodge (TCL) Pilot Project will be analyzed at the project-level. All analyses will be combined into the same EIR/S document.³ With four different levels of action including program-level reviews, project-level reviews, design concepts, and pilot projects, there is great potential for the distinctions among the different review levels to be very complicated and potentially contentious. We recommend staff lay out these four levels of action very clearly for the public and decision-makers. In addition, in our comments on the 2015 NOP,⁴ we noted the likelihood of additional complexities if and when alternatives to both the Area Plan and Lodge project are considered. As expected, this four-part process has now become even more complex as it contains a variety of program-level and project-level alternatives, as noted on p. 65 of the staff packet.

As discussed in our NOP comments, we request the Tahoe City Lodge Pilot Project and Kings Beach Design Concept be removed from the Area Plan environmental review process and evaluated separately.

At a minimum, we request that TRPA and Placer County ensure the environmental document and the factors of the four-part process are very clearly explained to the public and decision-makers before proceeding with the environmental documentation.

North Stateline Town Center:

Action alternatives should not include changes to the area included in the North Stateline Town Center in the RPU, as the application of the Town Center incentives to this area will not be addressed as part of the Area Plan EIR/S.⁵ Placer County has stated that the area may be considered for such amendments in the future. Therefore, this needs to be removed from the alternatives.

² “The EIR/EIS will analyze impacts of the Area Plan at a program level.” (NOP, p. 2)

³ Staff clarified at Placer County’s 6/16/2015 public scoping workshop that the TCL Pilot Project review would eventually be considered separate from the Area Plan at the project-approval stage.

⁴ <http://friendswestshore.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/FOWS-TASC-comments-on-Placer-NOP-Area-Plan-7.31.2015-w-att.pdf>

⁵ “To utilize Town Center incentives, properties within the North Stateline Special Plan Area shall prepare a detailed Town Center plan addressing TRPA requirements, including for Open Space.” (Draft TBAP, p. 94).

Tahoe City Lodge Pilot Project and Area Plan process:

As stated in our comments on the NOP, the TCL project should be evaluated separate of the Area Plan. We reiterate our concerns herein, and raise additional questions based on the information in the staff packet.

Tahoe City Lodge alternatives:

The developer has previously said that anything less than 120 units in the Tahoe City Lodge project would be infeasible (as stated during the applicant's 7/29/2015 public meeting). This begs the question of whether proposed Alternative Two will be readily dismissed as infeasible due to containing less than half of the 'minimally required' tourist units. This needs to be addressed upfront so the EIR/S does not evaluate an alternative that will eventually be dismissed as not feasible. In addition, the size of the Tahoe City clubhouse should also be separated from the Area Plan process. Both the TCL project and potential future increases in the TC Golf Course clubhouse are *projects* which should be considered only after a new *Plan* has been adopted for the area, and can therefore guide the type of community that Tahoe City wants to see in the future.

In addition, as noted previously, the inclusion of the TCL project with the Area Plan alternatives adds more complexity to an already confusing process. With TCL alternatives now being tied to specific Area Plan alternatives (as proposed), it is unclear how this will affect future considerations for the Area Plan. It appears that there will be no stand-alone assessment of the TCL project that can be separated from the Area Plan alternatives. Therefore, what will happen if one particular Area Plan alternative is favored while a different alternative (or no alternative) is desired for the TCL project? Although the TRPA Board has discussed the idea of 'piecing together' different aspects of plan alternatives after a draft EIS has been released,⁶ there has been a general tendency to select alternatives as they are proposed and apply typically minor revisions to those alternatives. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the alternatives proposed in the staff report will establish the makeup of the alternatives that will be considered in the future.

Although we believe it is not appropriate to include the TCL project in the Area Plan analysis, if the Governing Board (Board) chooses to retain it, we request this issue be addressed and the parameters for future consideration be clearly laid out now for the Board and public.

⁶ For example, such discussions occurred among the GB in 2012 leading up to the final RPU adoption.

Alternatives to examine in the DEIR/S

As recommended in our comments on the NOP, the EIR/S should include alternatives that provide a complete path toward threshold achievement and maintenance. We reiterate our recommendations related to:

- A conservation/threshold-based alternative;
- Monitoring requirements and performance targets within the Area Plan;
- Ridgeline developments;⁷
 - *It is unfortunate that a renowned National Treasure such as Lake Tahoe does not already have ridgeline protections in place. We request Placer County and TRPA take the opportunity to include these protections in the Area Plan, at a minimum.*
- Scenic resources and views; and
- Protection of night sky.

Maximum densities among alternatives:

All action alternatives prescribe the same density (tourist: 40 units/acre; multi-family: 25 units/acre) for the Town Centers (p. 64, staff report). As requested in our comments on the NOP, alternatives should include scaled-down changes that do not apply the RPU's *maximum* densities.

⁷ Although we recommend protections in comments on the NOP, we did not specify examples. However, it is important to note that other locations have already adopted such protections. For example, Marin County's Code⁷ states:

"2. Development near ridgelines. No construction shall occur on top of, or within 300 feet horizontally, or within 100 feet vertically of visually prominent ridgelines, whichever is more restrictive, unless no other suitable locations are available on the site or the lot is located substantially within the ridgeline area as defined herein. If structures must be placed within this restricted area because of site constraints or because siting the development outside of the ridgeline area will result in greater visual or environmental impacts, they shall be in locations that are the least visible from adjacent properties and view corridors."