

Washoe Citizens Action Network meeting, 12/11/18, 6:00-8:15 PM, 50-60 individuals present

This is the first public meeting put on by this new group. Many area activists were present representing neighborhoods all over the county. Most of the attendees were familiar with local issues and some of the challenges. On the dais were Brandon Camp (Stead businessman), Jeanne Herman (County Commissioner, District-5), Tammy Holt-Still (Lemmon Valley activist), Bill Johnson (County Commission Candidate, District-3), and Steve Wolgast (County Commission Candidate, District-2).

Brandon Camp opened the meeting remarking that the area has gone through many changes that are unpopular. He says that the responsibility lies with the state and local government. "Being an informed voter is not enough. It is all about citizen involvement."

Bill Johnson said that he was a fifth generation Nevadan and that he'd seen a lot of changes. He made the point that the Truckee Meadows is a fire sale for developers now. He supports responsible development and went through a list of bad developments that have been approved or are under consideration. He mocked the popular developer marketing claim that they will "give us open space". Open space is what we have if they don't build. He believes in humanity first and that we shouldn't see all the decisions made based just on money.

Tammy Holt-Still created the Lemmon Valley Swan Lake Recovery Committee and described some of their efforts. She made the point that the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Authority should be protecting us from some of these terrible developments. She thinks we should push them to fulfill their role and is hopeful following a meeting with Kim Robinson (TMRPA Director). She has also met with Mayor Schieve and Councilwoman Duerr to describe the problems with flood insurance and how claimants are not protected and how this relates to the Daybreak development. She quoted Jefferson "When the people fear the government, we have tyranny. When the government fears the people, we have liberty." She thinks we should push Washoe County on issues county-wide.

Jeanne Herman asserted that we should bring back the previous Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) system. The CAB is really the peoples voice in the county issues. She's frustrated on the commission. She's not considered a "team player" on the commission. [Aside; this is inevitable given the bias characterized by the other commissioners to favor all development.] "The developers are running our (county) government. We need more citizen participation." She wants to hear from her constituents. She wants to see the regional plan updated. It is out of date and is not being followed. She says the county "lives on grants" since they do not get enough revenue to cover their budgets. She thinks there are too many administrators and the salaries are too high.

Carly Borchard spoke representing the Verdi Community Council and is a member of The Society for the Preservation of Verdi. She sits on the Ward-5 Neighborhood Advisory Board (Reno) as well as Chairs the Verdi/West Truckee Meadows Community Advisory Board (Washoe). Her organization got the West Meadows development reduced from 600 homes to 300 homes. They had 100 attendees at every meeting. So attendance and participation does work and is extremely important. She said that stipulations on the development are simply ignored by developers. Laws are being broken by and there is no enforcement of negotiated stipulations. The main reason for speaking is to express importance that these meetings have an action plan moving forward to promote change.

Steve Wolgast described his experience fighting the Ascente development in his neighborhood. He described how the neighbors' frustration over this development led him to form the WRAP group to try to fight bad development on a county-wide scale. He realized that the problems he saw in the Galena area were duplicated in neighborhoods all over the county. Steve went on to briefly describe his campaign. He thinks his strategy to leverage the broad dissatisfaction with development was the right strategy, but he could communicate with enough voters.

Mike Lawson could not be present. He had been discouraged from speaking publicly about the Planning Commission issues. Steve presented his concerns. The first big issue is the use of misleading engineering reports presented by developers. The same engineering firms do reports for the same developers repeatedly on different projects. This is a fundamental conflict of interest arrangement. One would expect the engineering reports to be biased in favor of the developer's plan. He recited a couple of recent examples of flawed reports used to justify developments. This includes the one about the traffic study conducted the day after New Year's and the one that didn't include the waste water generation as part of the flood contribution. He made the point that there is no administrative nor legal way to challenge such reports. There is no way to get an independent engineering study recognized by the county as legitimate. Carly Borchard commented that the Verdi Community Council had hired an independent engineer and commissioned a report. They presented the report at both the City Planning Commission and the City Council. She thought this approach was effective. Steve went on to cover Mike's other primary concern that had to do with the "zombie" projects within the Truckee Meadows. These are projects that would normally have expired after two years, but have been kept on the books with special extension contracts from the County. The majority are projects from before the downturn of 2009. Many developments had received tentative map approval, but had not completed all the detail work to have the final maps completed. It is not known whether these projects will "come to life" again and move forward to final map approval and then grading and construction, or whether they will be abandoned by the developer. If these projects are changed, then they will need to back through an approval process with public review again. This assumes that the county planning staff does not simply incorporate changes into the final map with no public notification. This would be a manageable problem but for the sheer number of such plans. There are 68,000 dwelling units that have approved tentative maps, but have not started construction. This is more than are forecast to be needed for the next 20 years (42,000). It is impossible to do sensible planning with these projects "in the closet" that could be revived at any time. In many cases, the area plans have been changed so that these older development plans are not compliant with the current area plans.

Audience Q&A

- We need to have at least one action item for each meeting so we're not just having a complaint session.
- We need an administrative process with actions.
- Washoe County has a federal requirement to have a manual of procedures. They have none and are at risk of losing federal funding. This is a leverage point against the county.
- We should get ourselves educated on the Open Meeting Law. The county violates it routinely and is vulnerable to being challenged.

Steve's impression is that the biggest challenge may be to expand the audience. Steve recognized many in the audience from his campaign and involvement with WRAP. He was pleased to see them at this meeting, but WashoeCAN needs to reach beyond this core group to effect change in a county with 285,000 voters.

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