

Focus on Quality of Life Brings Positive Change

By Nicole Ramirez Thomas for the Tahoe Daily Tribune

Quality of life, as a basic standard for our life experience, has far reaching and meaningful connections to the health and resilience of a community. Policy considerations that prioritize quality of life emphasize the natural and cultural environment, education, community, economics, and the physical and mental wellbeing of the residents in communities. Attention to quality of life issues fosters equity and diversity, community vibrancy, and a strong sense of place and identity. Promoting issues and making decisions with quality of life at the forefront creates strong, happy communities.

Policies enacted by the City Council directly impact these vital community concerns. Many of us in this community already live with a good quality of life, and for that we are grateful. But there are many in this community who do not. People are challenged by lack of housing and suffer housing instability; they are challenged by transportation and mobility issues; they are challenged by extreme economic uncertainty and difficulty finding access to resources such as food, medicine, and health care. When you stop to consider what makes someone's day-to-day life more difficult, the importance of addressing quality of life issues becomes apparent.

The City of South Lake Tahoe Strategic Plan, created based on feedback from the community, was adopted by the City Council in 2021, and outlines many priorities and goals. In a surprisingly short amount of time, the City has initiated projects that address several of the priorities. Among the projects underway are housing initiatives, traction on the Mid-Town revitalization plan, and transportation. These projects have drawn attention to the well-being of South Lake Tahoe residents and livability.

Focus is essential to tackling community challenges. The Sugar Pine affordable housing project, the Lease to Locals program, financial support for Lake Link, and the groundbreaking of the new recreation center all demonstrate that the focus a strategic plan brings is powerful and that a

strategic plan helps maintain the City's attention on what the community has deemed to be important priorities. The community, the City of South Lake Tahoe staff, and the incoming City Council should maintain this focus and momentum. Despite this admirable progress, there are still many goals for the City to accomplish and priorities to be addressed. Together, we can make positive, healthy decisions that support and enrich our daily lives.

After the last two years, we all understand adversity. The circumstances we have endured together over the last few years that greatly affected our quality of life have caused many of us to understand the need to promote health and well-being. The pandemic made it difficult to enjoy our families and communities and for some of us, constricted our ability to pursue life goals. Everything became harder and perhaps less enjoyable. The Caldor Fire also challenged South Lake Tahoe, threatening lives, homes, businesses, the livelihood of the community, and even the City's existence. To overcome these events, we had to be resilient, at both a personal and community level.

Our world has changed. Through these difficult circumstances, we understood on a visceral level that there are things in our lives and community worth preserving, and some things that need to change. Shifts in work life and living situations, demands for equity and environmental and social justice, and a heightened awareness of the health of our day-to-day lives have all been factors in how we rebuild as we move forward. Moreover, the community's experience with the threat of wildfire and our individual daily experiences with the Lake highlight the environmental challenges we face.

Quality of life makes a difference. We need to frame our decisions with an eye toward positive change for the well-being of the community and the individuals and families who make up that community. By focusing on and prioritizing quality of life in policy making and implementation we can bring meaningful change that will make South Lake Tahoe better for all of us.