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October 10, 2006

Time to hear from the working class

By Jamie Bate, jbate@sierrasun.com

October 9, 2006

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TRPA, WHATT, NLTRA, etc: Too often our region's acronym alphabet of organizations, no matter how noble the cause, are the center of attention.

For several years now we've been to the meetings dissecting the issues that have our region struggling to provide affordable housing options. Just about all the acronyms have had forums and such.

Experts have told us what other towns have done and local business owners have recounted their problems of hiring and retaining quality workers because of a lack of affordable options.

We've studied the numbers that point to a problem. The median household income in Eastern Placer County is \$48,500. Just across the basin the median home price in South Lake Tahoe as of June 1 was \$499,000, somewhat less even than the North Shore. While Truckee's median price dropped 13 percent over the last year, it still is a whopping \$689,000. And, according to Dean Runyan Associates and the U.S. Census Bureau, 4 out of 10 units in the region are second homes.

We've even heard from neighbors of potential affordable housing projects objecting to such plans for a variety of reasons; some legitimate, some right out of the NIMBY playbook.

But what we haven't heard are the voices of people who really, truly need this type of housing. Well, on Wednesday, Oct. 11, on the North Shore it's time for a number of firsts.

Vista Village, the new name for the prior Cedar Grove project, is being taken to the public, albeit not fully conceptualized. That's because the people and groups involved in the Tahoe Vista project want to hear from the people who just might live there in the near future.

The development has the potential to serve a broad spectrum of North Lake Tahoe's workforce housing needs including both rental and ownership housing opportunities for working individuals and families earning a wide range of incomes.

Yes, Pacific West Communities, Inc., the Mourelatos Family and the Workforce Housing Association of Truckee Tahoe (WHATT) will be the experts — again. But they will be at the Kings Beach Elementary School Auditorium at 6 p.m. to hear what families who don't make \$200,000-plus a year need to become more deeply vested in our community.

Jamie Bate is the editor of the Sierra Sun. Reach him at jbate@sierrasun.com

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