



## OPINION: In This Election Year, Vote for the TBID

By Melissa Sigg, Tahoe Art Haus & Tahoe Tap Haus



As a young reporter back in the early 2000s covering North Lake Tahoe, it didn't take long for me to realize that a lot of the stories I was writing had a common theme – a lack of autonomy for the area. Whether it was a debate about workforce housing or a new rec center or the old fire station, the bottom line was that all major decisions had to come from Placer County since North Tahoe is unincorporated. As a resident, I have found this extremely frustrating at times.

Now the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association, in cooperation with Placer County, has found a way to give the area more local control. The solution? A Tourism Business Improvement District, or TBID. A TBID is a funding mechanism that is controlled by the tourism-related businesses that agree to assess themselves. In the United States, there are currently more than 150 TBIDs, with the vast majority located in California, where the first TBID was created in West Hollywood in the early 1990s. Our neighbors, South Lake Tahoe and Truckee, formed TBIDs in 2006 and 2015, respectively. The North Lake Tahoe TBID would establish a 1 percent assessment of all gross revenues on tourism related businesses, including restaurants, retail and recreation. (Gas and grocery sales are excluded.) Lodging will have a 2 percent assessment, except for those in Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows and Northstar, which will be 1 percent since those areas already have assessments in place to fund transportation, such as the Mountaineer in Squaw Valley and Alpine. These assessments can be passed on to the customer at the point of sale.

How does the TBID provide more local control? First, it gets the NLTRA and our business associations out from under Placer County's thumb. The Resort Association is currently funded wholly by Placer County with transient occupancy tax (TOT) dollars, a lodging tax that is collected by the county. The TBID, which is expected to generate \$6 million a year, would replace county funding for the NLTRA, as well as for the Tahoe City Downtown Association and North Tahoe Business Association. This allows these organizations to advocate for the local business community in a much stronger way, and gives North Tahoe businesses a more independent voice.

Even better, Placer County has committed to redirecting the \$4.1 million it currently allocates to fund the NLTRA and business associations, to fund transportation solutions, and workforce housing initiatives – important issues that are on the top of everyone's minds right now. This additional money will help to expand public transportation and ensure that more employees can afford to live here. Best of all, we get to decide where those funds are spent, and who knows what a community needs better than the people who live and work there? Unlike TOT funds, which can go into the Placer County general fund and are not guaranteed to be spent in North Tahoe, TBID funds must be spent on programs and activities that directly benefit the businesses paying the assessment. Again, this means more local control, more money spent on projects that are important to TBID members.



The TBID process moves to the Placer County Board of Supervisors for next steps once 51 percent of North Tahoe businesses sign petitions in favor of it. The weight of each petition, or its total value, is based on the estimated assessment the business will pay so for example, a larger business represents a larger portion of the whole. The NLTRA hopes that all petitions, which each business will receive, are returned to them as soon as possible so that they can move forward as planned for a potential TBID start date of April 2021.

I know change can be scary, but not changing can be even scarier. The TBID offers an opportunity to regain control of our future, and create solutions to some of our biggest problems. In my 20 years in Tahoe, this is the first time I have seen Placer County offer North Tahoe a chance for some independence. Let's not pass up this moment.