

SLPOA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Nothing has been happening. A lot has been happening. The beginning of Charles Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities is considered brilliant. Starting with that wouldn't your beginning thoughts be, "My what a brilliant start" and wouldn't those thoughts carry over into your opinion of this column?

Publicly nothing is happening regarding the development. The developers say they are still, in the "information gathering stage" and no plans are imminent.

On the other hand a lot has been happening. Your SLPOA preservation committee meets monthly. SLPOA meets bi-weekly with our allied groups (Sierra Club, Sierra Watch, MAPF, DSAA, SYRCL, Palisades, and No. Fork American River Alliance). There is not a day, for example, when my inbox does not have SLPOA business in it.

Some time before Christmas an email was circulated purporting to express Mark Foster's feelings about the state of things on Donner Summit. The email was a list of frustrations culminating with they would just fence all the property, restrict access; and close Royal Gorge. Finally, they'd simply divide the property into 160 acre parcels and sell it all off.

I'm not exposing "State secrets" because the email was circulated widely and was posted on the wall of the Soda Springs Post Office for awhile. Reactions differed as did suggested responses.

My reaction was, let's see what the truth is and then see where we go. Your SLPOA Board agreed so I called Todd Foster and suggested a "frank" discussion. Todd was amenable and we met just before Christmas.

The result was that we agreed to talk substantively. Naturally there was anguish a lot to overcome on the way to talking. Both sides are suspicious.

There followed a series of conversations about what subjects should we talk about, who should be included, ground rules, etc.

Simultaneously we were talking to the other groups. Some feel we have no business talking to the developers and others think talking could be good.

If we don't talk we continue as we have, the developers eventually file plans, the CEQA process begins, the County approves something, lawsuits follow with resolution to be decided by the Court or a settlement outside of court. The attraction here is that we have years to build public support, raise money, influence the CEQA process, and hopefully influence the Board of Supervisors. The negative is it's contentious, long, and costly with no guarantee regarding the outcome.

Alternatively we can talk. We may come to a solution and so have some control over our fate.

There are people who hold out the hope of no development. That might be nice; but it's impractical. It's impractical because the developers can get permits to build something. The question is how much and what kind. There are no "sugar daddies" who are going to purchase all Royal Gorge lands and save them for us. No one will contribute money so that no house can be build behind me. On the other hand, there will be interest in campaigns to save some of the Royal Gorge lands such as Van Norden.

There are also people who say that the economy will trump everything. The corollary to that is that the economy will never improve. We must hope it will recover though maybe not immediately. At that point, planning being done, the developers will be ready to take advantage of a reinvigorated economy. It's only

the short term that the economy is a problem. We must assume the developers have a longer time frame than the immediate.

A corollary to that is let's drag the developers into bankruptcy. Do we really want the Royal Gorge lands to be sold at a deep discount to someone else with resources to do even more?

The best solution is to interact with the developers, our allied groups, and County government to achieve the best solution for The Summit and the future. Whatever the solution will be needs to include locking up undeveloped lands for the future. There the land trusts and public campaigns have their places.

In January I was doing a little work with presidential inaugurals and I remembered this, "remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof. Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate." John Kennedy was right. Negotiations might be too strong but talking is not.

If talking works, we can all win. If it doesn't we continue as we have but will have shown that we've tried everything we can. Whatever happens, your homeowners' association will be in the fore. It's our neighborhood and our community. No one is going to make decisions for us. It is also our responsibility to the Summit.