

A photograph of a man in profile, wearing a blue short-sleeved button-down shirt, khaki pants, and sunglasses. He is looking out over a body of water with a forested background under a blue sky with light clouds. A teal vertical bar is on the left side of the image.

Community Advocate

an interview by Kathleen Doler photo Niobe Burden

Dennis Crabb

believes win-win agreements can be negotiated between environmentalists, local governments and developers. In fact, he's spent his career steering Tahoe communities through the legal scrum of creating and implementing such plans. The 58-year-old attorney has lived in the Tahoe area for 26 years. He and his wife initially thought Tahoe was a short stop along his career trajectory. Instead, the Tahoe Basin hooked them.

Crabb was the city attorney of South Lake Tahoe for 16 years, guiding it through many of its redevelopment efforts. He has been Truckee's town attorney for the past 11 years. At the South Lake Tahoe law firm Rollston, Henderson, Rasmussen & Crabb, he also advises the foothills towns of Sutter Creek and Jackson.

The second challenge is the workforce housing issue. Truckee's workforce is now commuting from Reno and that dramatically impacts the character of the community. One of the groups in which I'm involved on South Shore is Tahoe Tomorrow, whose principal focus is how to recreate a sense of community when at least 60 percent of the houses are second homes.

What was the most interesting part of the redevelopment process in South Lake Tahoe?

It was the realization by both the environmental and business communities that they were failing. It started in about 1980 when the head of the League to Save Lake Tahoe, the mayor of South Lake Tahoe, the president of the Chamber of Commerce and others got together and said, "We're all losing." From that meeting arose the realization on the part of the business commu-

we're going to devise a mitigation program that improves intersections in Truckee."

And the town went, "Excuse us?" So they had me file an amicus brief saying 'Here are Truckee's concerns that were not addressed and that make the Environmental Impact Report inadequate.' The court pulled a couple of paragraphs right out of that amicus brief and put them in its decision.

Now that the judge has blocked the Martis Valley plan, what's going to happen?

My guess would be that they'll appeal. They have only two choices, redo the Environmental Impact Report or appeal. From the Town's point of view, it would be preferable for them to rewrite the EIR and deal with the Town's issues.

There have been successful negotiations with developers at Northstar in Martis Valley. Truckee can take some credit for that, because the Town, the Mountain

One man has represented both of the region's municipalities — City of South Lake Tahoe and Town of Truckee. Attorney Dennis Crabb advised South Tahoe during its recent redevelopment and is now doing the same for Truckee on Martis Valley and other growth issues.

Crabb's strong views have been formed through decades of hands-on experience. He recently announced that he would be seeking a different kind of hands-on experience this November as a candidate for El Dorado County Supervisor.

What are the greatest challenges facing resort towns today?

The third wave — which is what the foothills and the Sierra are seeing now — a wave of Bay Area folks leaving the cities and buying houses in Sutter Creek, Jackson, Truckee and South Lake Tahoe. Truckee has a very sophisticated system for dealing with the growth, as a result of the town incorporating and having an excellent staff. Tahoe has a very heavy governmental structure because of Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. Jackson, Sutter Creek and other communities are facing this third wave with no sophisticated regulatory structure and very little experience dealing with growth.

nity that the economic engine in the region is The Lake. So one of your principal business goals is protecting water quality and scenic vistas. And the environmentalists got it, too: unless somebody is generating resources to create the necessary environmental programs, they aren't going to happen. We can never generate enough governmental resources. But at the beginning of the process, nobody trusted anybody.

Truckee filed a brief in the lawsuit against the Martis Valley Community Plan. Was that a tough decision?

It was a difficult decision because the Truckee Town Council, like local governments everywhere, is inclined to defer to other locally-elected officials. But the Plan essentially said "We'll figure out this workforce housing thing later, and in the meantime they can all live in Truckee." And secondly, it said, "We understand there are going to be major traffic impacts and so

Area Preservation Foundation and East West Partners essentially invented the form in the case of the development of Old Greenwood — a private tax on residential transactions that's used to purchase open space.

We were the first ones to do it, and it's been extremely successful, because it benefited all the parties. The developers got open space immediately adjacent to their project, the environmentalists got critical open space, and the real estate market went up so fast that the developer could effectively just build the tax into prices.

What's it like working for so many different communities simultaneously?

Issues in mountain communities all tend to run in packs. So if you get into something and you have no idea what to do, you can get on the computer or the phone and find somewhere, somebody dealing with that same issue.