

South Tahoe's city attorneys' jobs on the line today

By Kathryn Reed

One or both of South Lake Tahoe's city attorneys may be asked to pack up their office after having only been on the job since June.

In a special closed session meeting today at 9am the City Council will meet to evaluate Patrick Enright and Jacqueline Mittelstadt, the two attorneys.

It seems like something regarding the City Attorneys Office comes up at nearly every City Council meeting. Some of the initial problems stemmed from no transition plan being in place when they came on board.

Plus, in the past South Tahoe has always had one city attorney. Mittelstadt was hired as city attorney, and Enright as assistant city attorney/redevelopment counsel. Part of their short time in town has been spent working out of a conference room because their offices were being renovated.

Some of the issues appear to be territorial. City Manager Dave Jinkens has had the authority to hire outside special counsel at his discretion. The council unanimously is trying to curtail that activity – thinking two city attorneys could help in that matter.

Another issue is new employees have their way of doing things, which isn't necessarily how things have been done in the past. They have rubbed a few department heads the wrong way.

"The City Attorneys Office noted some internal irregularities in the city and reports of which were not necessarily well received," Mittelstadt said by phone Labor Day weekend. She is

hoping for an amicable resolution to the problems. She would not elaborate about the report or the people named in it.

City Council members are being mum about what is going behind closed doors.

Mittelstadt at the Sept. 1 council meeting asked to meet with her five bosses in closed session to discuss personnel issues. They denied her request.

But in an odd twist of circumstances, it was agreed 3-2 to give her a performance evaluation at a special closed session two days later. Mayor Jerry Birdwell and Councilman Bill Crawford were not in favor of that idea.

Usually new employees are reviewed after six months, with annual reviews after that.

Mittelstadt's review was not made public. Birdwell spoke briefly to her after the Sept. 3 meeting. The conversation has not been made public. She will not be at today's meeting because of previous plans to be out of town.

Enright will be there today, though it's unknown if he will be in council chambers during the council's deliberations.

If someone is let go, it will have to be done in open session per state law. Enright and Mittelstadt's contracts say they must be given 90-days notice.

Other business:

Following the closed session, the council has a special budget meeting set for 10am.