

Convolutd process for 2 SLT city manager candidates

By Kathryn Reed



It could be a matter of days before the next city manager of South Lake Tahoe is named. The City Council is interviewing two candidates today and a quasi-public panel will interview the men Monday.

Councilman Bill Crawford is declining to be part of today's process.

"I'm not participating in the selection because I don't feel I have anything to contribute because I'm leaving office at the end of November," Crawford told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He is in favor of the council that will be seated at the end of the year hiring the next city manager and having an interim after Dave Jinkens' last day on Aug. 7. At least one new member will be on the council – the person taking Crawford's seat. Mayor Kathay Lovell is seeking a third term and Councilman Jerry Birdwell is on the fence regarding re-election.

Crawford does not intend to vote for any city manager his colleagues deem suitable.

Who are the candidates?

The candidates before the council today are Mike Segrest and Tony O'Rourke.

Although the council has been presented with Segrest being the current town manager of Moraga, a small town in the East Bay of San Francisco, he has given the town his resignation letter. A May 28 article in the *Contra Costa Times* says Segrest is resigning after being on the job since February 2009 because of his wife's health issues.

Segrest was manager of the town of Snowmass Village, Colo., for five years before moving to California. Last month he was one of three finalists for the town manager job in Telluride, but didn't make the final cut.

O'Rourke has been the executive director of Beaver Creek Resort Company in Colorado since 1996. This is not the ski resort owned by Vail Resorts.

According to the company's website, it is "a very special hybrid, combining a homeowners' association, a resort association, with some municipal services added. The Resort Company, a Colorado nonprofit corporation incorporated on April 30, 1979, was designed to help Beaver Creek become and remain a unique resort community."

O'Rourke was in city government mostly in Florida and Texas before taking the job in the Rockies.

The council had wanted to interview four candidates, but two backed out.

Lovell said it's possible the council could choose other candidates to interview if Segrest and O'Rourke don't pass muster with them or Monday's interviewers.

Some recognizable names applied for the position but were not chosen to be interviewed – the current redevelopment director, a former assistant city manager now with Reno, a former housing employee, and the manager of Heidi's restaurant.

Where is the public input?

On Monday, each candidate will have a 90-minute interview before a panel made up of representatives from the five city commissions (Planning, Parks and Recreation, Airport, Latino Affairs, Sustainability), both chambers of commerce, a disabled advocate and senior citizen representative.

No one from tourism, the city's major sector, is involved; the minimum wage worker isn't represented; the largest landowner – the U.S. Forest Service wasn't invited; the largest employer – Barton Healthcare, is not involved. John Q. Public is also not part of the process.

People have told *Lake Tahoe News* it seems like special interest groups are making the decision about the city manager job, which is the highest position in South Lake Tahoe city government.

When the Governing Board of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency hired now former Executive Director John Singlaub, a broader public panel was involved, which included this reporter. When now former Executive Director Patrick Kahler was hired on at the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, the board interviewed the finalists in public.

Birdwell had proposed having a social at his bed and breakfast for the public to mingle with the candidates, but Lovell didn't like the idea. She also didn't like the idea of having them stay at the Black Bear Inn, fearing the perception it would create. However, the council as a whole didn't have a problem with now City Attorney Patrick Enright staying there when he interviewed. Both city manager candidates are at the Black Bear – staying for free. The city was not going to pay for their overnight accommodations no matter where they slept.

The public may attend the sessions that start at 8:30am Monday at Lake Tahoe Airport, but they will not be able to ask questions. Each panelist may ask two questions and the same questions must be asked of both candidates.

“Each panel will have a scorecard and we will be provided the total score from each group,” Lovell said of the process.

It is up to each councilmember as to what weight he or she gives that scorecard when it comes to making a hiring decision. The council will discuss the matter in closed session on Tuesday at the regular council meeting, but Lovell said it’s likely a final decision will require a special meeting.

The council would like to have someone on board before Jinkens leaves.

Lovell said it would be the incoming city manager who hires the next police chief even though Jinkens has started the process and applications are due by the end of the month.

The process

It has been the city attorney, Enright, who doesn’t have human resources experience, who the council asked to spearhead the hiring process once consultant Bob Murray culled together the list of names.

The council’s lack of confidence in the HR manager is why Enright was brought in.

Enright and Murray have provided the council with possible questions to ask the candidates.

But what the council wants in the next city manager has not been discussed. Nor has it been a collaborative process with staff.

It didn’t have to be this way. An entity that wants to discuss the vision for its next leader is Lake Tahoe Community College. That board has agreed to work with faculty and classified staff to outline what it is everyone wants in the next president.

That approach has not been taken by this City Council.

Instead, at the last-minute the council decided to have the candidates interview with eight members of the labor groups and the eight department heads – separately. This means a time consuming, inefficient four sets of interviews for the candidates.

Gene Palazzo is one of the directors on the panel even though he applied for the job of city manager.

There has been no coordinated effort to ensure the candidates won't keep being asked the same questions. Nor is there a format to share the answers with each panel.