

South Lake Tahoe council hires city manager

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe's next city manager has read the grand jury report, he knows the disconnect between the government and the people it is supposed to serve, he knows about shoveling snow, he knows about the economic rollercoaster ride of a tourism based economy – and still Tony O'Rourke accepted the job.

O'Rourke's experience in the private and public sector led the City Council on Thursday night to vote 4-0 to select him over the three other candidates they interviewed. Councilman Bill Crawford has chosen to stay out of the interview and selection process.



Tony O'Rourke will replace Dave Jinkens as city manager of South Lake Tahoe.

Photo/Austin Fay

"I think it's a great community and a great opportunity for progress. I know there are some real challenges," O'Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News* shortly after he was offered the job July

1. "It's an opportunity to respond to the needs of the community and produce a government that works better."

Lake Tahoe News did not post this story earlier because the final details of O'Rourke's contract as well as final documents involving the background check did not come until today. A verbal agreement was given, but the contract has not been signed and all the particulars are still being worked out.

O'Rourke will be making in the ballpark of \$169,502 – what current City Manager Dave Jinkens is earning per year. The contract will probably be for three years, also what Jinkens started with. Other benefits beyond the standard health and retirement are being worked on. It is not known if these would include moving costs, paying for temporary housing, a housing allotment, car or something else. His first day on the job should be right around when Jinkens leaves Aug. 7.

The council is expected to ratify the contract at the July 13 meeting.

"It is going to be a whole paradigm shift in style," Mayor Kathay Lovell said of going from Jinkens to O'Rourke. "(O'Rourke) is very refreshing. He has great people skills, great communication skills. I think he is really strong."

The four council members who voted all favored O'Rourke. However, Councilman Bruce Grego, who again did not return phone calls, has been lobbying to keep Jinkens on longer.

Councilman Hal Cole was not available for comment.

O'Rourke, 55, this morning let his bosses at the Beaver Creek Resort Company in Colorado know he is leaving. He has been their executive director since 1996.

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.”

It does have ties to Vail Resorts, which owns Heavenly Mountain Resort.

“I think that he is strong enough he will be independent and he will not be tied to Vail Resorts,” Councilman Jerry Birdwell said. The hiring of a city manager has not gotten Birdwell off the fence in deciding if he will seek a second term in November, nor will he give a date for when he expects to announce a decision.

Birdwell went on to say, “I think he was the best qualified person who applied for the position and he will be a great asset to this community.”

O’Rourke’s familiarity with airports was another positive, Birdwell said.

“He comes in understanding a mountain resort and tourism,” Lovell said. “In the capacity he currently has, even though it is not an incorporated city, it’s like it. They have an elected board, they have similar utilities, they have police and fire.”

One difference is the average daily room rate in Beaver Creek is about \$500, while it is \$120 in the redevelopment area of South Lake Tahoe and much less in the rest of town.

O’Rourke sees his blend of private and public experience as a bonus. He thinks one of the problems with cities is having leaders with only government experience.

Before joining Beaver Creek Resort Company, O’Rourke was assistant city manager in Tallahassee for a year; city manager of Coral Springs, Fla., from 1992-95 and assistant city

manager from 1989-92; assistant city manger of Richardson, Texas, from 1983-85. He has also worked in Dallas, Ithaca, N.Y., Boulder, and was community development director of Isla Vista in California from 1977-79.

Lovell admitted his lack of experience in California was a strike against him when it came to her vote, but she said all the other aspects of his career and experience swayed her to put him at the top of her list – the same place the other council members put O'Rourke.

O'Rourke will be moving to the area with his wife and 16-year-old son. They have two other children who are in college. He is a skier, but prefers to snowshoe with his dog.

O'Rourke plans to engage the public as soon as he arrives.

"I want a laundry list of names of a cross-section of the community to see what the issues are," O'Rourke said. "We will quickly develop a strategic plan of action to address the most significant issues."

O'Rourke said change is definitely needed in the city and that "it's not a painless process and not without a lot of blood, sweat and tears."

He added, "Talk is cheap. We have to produce results. What attracted me to this (job) is that it is a great opportunity to produce great results. I'm not naïve. I know the difficulties of the past. We have to be above that."