

South Lake Tahoe council candidates delve into issues

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Fiscal responsibility and transparency in government were overriding themes of the nine South Lake Tahoe City Council candidates who attended the first forum of the election season. One person chose not to attend.

Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe hosted the Sept. 22 event at Harrah's Lake Tahoe. Based on the order they will appear on the ballot, candidates gave one-minute opening statements. Then they each answered four questions.



Soroptimist
Ann Swallow
asks the
candidates
questions
Sept. 22.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

Some substance and true examples of what they want to do was provided. Plenty of rhetoric and cliché responses were part of the mix. Sometimes the question was never answered.

Doug Cichowicz is concerned about how tax dollars are spent and believes there is waste at all levels of government.

Joy Curry wants to move South Lake Tahoe forward by improving the community, making it safe, and creating transparency in government.

Steve Kubby believes it's impossible to be a First World resort town with Third World roads and bikes.

Adrian Gooch says having worked for the city in redevelopment gives her the advantage of knowing the nuts and bolts of how the organization works. She wants to put pride back into the community.

Alice Jones would use her knowledge as a certified public accountant to help get the city on secure financial ground, work on long-range planning, and look into dealing with aging infrastructure.

Claire Fortier believes economic stability will come from geotourism, recreation and green business.

Angela Swanson opened with not asking for the group's vote, but instead their support, explaining a new vision for South Tahoe will take the effort of everyone in that room and outside those four walls to bring change – that it can't be done by just five councilmembers.

Georg May agrees there needs to be change and experience is important, but doesn't believe that a person has to have lived here nearly a lifetime to contribute to the future good.

Tom Davis, who has been off the council for the last six years after serving for 12, said when things are bad is when great leadership is needed – and said he is the one with those leadership skills.

Question No. 1: Criticism has been leveled on some in this race for having a distinct agenda. But the truth is everyone has an agenda, some call it a platform or issues, for why they are running. Describe your agenda.

Davis: The economy is his agenda. But he said it would take a council that can work together to bring change.

Cichowicz: Fiscal responsibility. He doesn't understand why Industrial Avenue was repaved instead of streets that have heavier use.

Curry: She wants her children and grandchildren to be able to live in South Lake Tahoe with successful jobs.

Kubby: He believes the city is treating businesses like ATM machines and that needs to end. He wants the council to get back to basics – roads and bike paths.

Gooch: She, too, wants to get back to basics, to have the council set sound policy, be approachable, honest and operate with transparency.

Jones: She has two small children for whom she wants to help build a stable community through teamwork and long-range planning, as well as looking at expenditures and why no money was in the budget for roads during fiscally sound years of just a few years ago.

Fortier: She's seeking a vibrant community through economic stability via creating a first-class recreation destination.

Swanson: She said it's not her agenda she will bring to the council, but what she hears from the people as she walks the streets. They are telling her they want the basics to be better.

May: He wants a more sustainable community. To pay for improvements he proposes taxing water bottles and getting everyone in government to be able to write grants.

Question No. 2: PERS, the Public Employee Retirement System, is a drain on the city's budget. How would you change the city's benefits package for employees?

Curry: She likes how the city has been working to make changes and believes it's important to be responsible with city contracts. She supports furlough days as a way to reduce costs. She also believes city employees deserve health benefits and a retirement.

Kubby: He doesn't understand how the Finance Department has nine employees, especially when the city has a \$3 million deficit. He pointed to retirement packages being a statewide issue.

Gooch: She just started collecting PERS. She said there are other agencies in the basin with better benefits than the city. She supports the changes that have been made, but does not believe more needs to be done.

Jones: She wants to compare South Lake Tahoe benefits to other cities the same size. But she also recognizes that if salary and benefit packages are cut too much, it will be difficult to find qualified people to hire.

Fortier: She pointed out the two ways of balancing a budget – putting money in, or taking money out. She would like to review PERS and the entire budget.

Swanson: With the city having seven bargaining units and a projected \$12 million deficit over the next three years, she believes being a good employer means looking at the long-term issues.

May: He doesn't want double standards with some employees getting one thing and new hires another.

Davis: Of the approximately 200 city employees, about half are employed by the police or fire department. He wants the best workers possible, but also wants the city to live within its means.

Cichowicz: He doesn't believe it makes sense to only cut at

the bottom. He wants PERS to be changed.

Question No. 3: The City Council also acts as the directors for the Redevelopment Agency. Many years ago the meetings were distinct, the agendas were distinct. Now it's all blurred with most of the public assuming the council is making the redevelopment decisions. There was even a time when the mayor was not in charge of the agency portion of the meeting. Would you leave the status quo, revert to the old ways or have some other way to handle business for the two entities? And why?

May: He talked in general about redevelopment without answering the question.

Davis: He didn't really answer the question except loosely to say there needs to be better outreach to the community.

Cichowicz: He didn't answer the question, and instead talked about the convention center project.

Curry: She just talked about how wonderful redevelopment is.

Kubby: He sees redevelopment as a disease.

Gooch: She was the first person to quasi answer the question. She explained the City Council and Redevelopment meetings were thrown into one meeting to capture everyone who came to a council meeting. She didn't elaborate if she would keep the status quo or not.

Jones: She's adamant the council should oversee redevelopment and questions some of the accounting practices in redevelopment.

Fortier: She grasped the question – it had to do with transparency. But she didn't answer the question. She wants everyone to understand the ramifications of redevelopment.

Swanson: She wants transparency to come through having study sessions so the process is slowed down so the public

understands the process and/or project.

Question No. 4: Will you be taking the city's health benefits, which is one of the perks of being a councilmember? Why or why not?

Kubby: He thinks he may need them by the time the job is done.

Gooch: With no past employee being elected to the council, the issues with getting retiree medical benefits at the same time as council benefits has not been dealt with. She believes she'll use council benefits as her supplemental source.

Jones: Undecided.

Fortier: Undecided.

Swanson: Maybe.

May: No.

Davis: Yes, as a supplemental to Medicare, which he goes on in January.

Cichowicz: Not likely.

Curry: No.

The South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association, South Tahoe Association of Realtors and *Lake Tahoe News* will be putting on a candidates' forum Oct. 14. More details will be posted soon.

Lake Tahoe News sent questions to the council and Douglas County Commission candidates to garner their viewpoints on a range of topics. Responses will be printed starting Oct. 1.