

Fortier: become a world-class, eco-resort and recreation destination

Publisher's note: *Lake Tahoe News is profiling candidates for South Lake Tahoe City Council and Douglas County Commission. The stories are being published in the order they were received.*

Name: Claire Fortier

Age: 57

How long have you lived in South Lake Tahoe?: 17 years

Job/profession: A former newspaper editor and CEO of a local medical practice, I now operate Laren Communications, a network of project-based communications freelancers.



Claire Fortier

What would you build or tear down on the South Shore to make it great, as in what Whistler is like?:

Since I have never been to Whistler, I can't compare it to South Lake Tahoe. However, I would tear down the energy-inefficient, rundown buildings in strip shopping centers and replace them with carefully considered, energy efficient, beautifully designed little shopping clusters that draw people

out of their cars and into small community nodes and pocket parks. I would make those nodes easily accessible by pedestrians and cyclists.

What form of recreation do you participate in? What recreation improvements would you strive to make in SLT?:

I hike, kayak, fish, camp, bike, garden, photograph and attend as many of the local events as I can afford, especially if they serve wine.

The South Shore should become a world-class, eco-resort and recreation destination. We should strive to improve all of our recreational infrastructure from bike trails to ball fields. From AYSO to the Olympics to disc golf to sledding, South Lake Tahoe should be the place that the world comes to play.

Recreation tourism is expected to be the driving force of the South Shore economy in the coming years, and according to a decade-old study, the majority of the South Lake Tahoe residents would like to see cycling-type facilities and maintenance projects. So, what do you specifically plan to do to improve our substandard, dangerous bike paths and lanes and roads beyond hiring a consultant to tell us how bad they are?

I support the work already in progress through the TRPA's 2010 Lake Tahoe Region Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. A strong community network, that has included the Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition and Sustainable Tahoe, has worked hard to develop that plan. When on City Council, I will work closely with the California Tahoe Conservancy, the TRPA and other governmental entities to make sure that plan becomes a reality. I will also look for opportunities with new redevelopment and street projects, like the project to upgrade Highway 50, to make the bike plan a reality. I will see what funding mechanisms are available to us now and in the future to complete and maintain South Shore bike paths.

What are the three major issues facing South Lake Tahoe and

how do you expect in four years to make it so they are not major issues when your tenure is through?

1. The most immediate issue facing our city is creating a transparent, accountable and innovative city government. With a new city manager and three new city councilmembers, that goal can be achieved immediately. And voters have an opportunity to make real changes. Voters must choose candidates who really understand the city's issues, who believe in cooperation as the only means to achieving measurable results and who have the courage make the tough decisions when necessary. I am one of those candidates.

2. We need to draft and then implement a five-year strategic plan based on a sustainable city budget and three or four achievable objectives. I would like those objectives to address the difficulty of doing business in the city and the basin, our city's crumbling infrastructure and the need to rebuild community.

3. We must build stronger connections with entities in the city boundaries, such as LTUSD and STPUD. We need to develop common goals and mutual areas of support with neighboring jurisdictions. We need to become a regional leader in the TRPA Regional Plan process and the new Prosperity Plan. The city is at a tipping point. We can either make a commitment to living prosperously within the environmental constraints of our delicate ecosystem or we can do nothing and consequently become nothing but a fading 1950s ghost town.

What compelling idea have you read in the citizens' input of the revamped, in-progress update of the city's General Plan?:

I am a strong proponent of the building code section that raises the bar on green building. I also support the idea of nodes of denser development that include pocket parks and surrounding green zones. I believe the city's push for sustainability has been a positive development since we must

live compatibly with our spectacular natural environment.

How do you plan to boost revenue in SLT?:

I plan to charge *Lake Tahoe News* a per-word content fee for the many questions they have asked me to answer. I pledge to donate that money back to the city.

Seriously, this is the biggest question facing our community, and there are no quick and easy answers. I would make the city friendlier to small businesses, because Mom and Pop are where to shop. I would encourage events, big and small, as ways of generating tourist dollars. I would establish a sustainability plan that focuses on capturing federal and state grant money for creating a green community, including establishing a training program for green building at the college. I would get the Hole filled as soon as possible with something other than timeshare. I would work with the great minds who have already developed a Prosperity Plan to map our economic viability. For example, enhancing our health and wellness business sector is a natural direction we should go.

What stands out to you in the 2010-11 budget?

There are a number of things that stand out about the budget, but overall this is what I think:

- We should thank the past few city councils that have made fiscally prudent decisions during the good times to give us a buffer that is not enjoyed by so many cities today.
- Our luck is running out and we need to address a \$12 million shortfall over the next five years. We need to look at 2010-11 budget not so much with how we scraped by this time, but how we will operate in five years.
- A new council needs to look at the budget with fresh eyes to reexamine all aspects of our city government. We need to consider what is necessary and what has become customary.

What needs to be done to allow businesses to thrive in SLT?

Again, this question requires more than a few sentences to answer. But even with unlimited space, I don't think I have adequate answers without some real investigation. One of my first acts as a councilmember would be to develop a business advisory board to get just those answers. What I have heard from business owners is that lack of coordination between agencies on the regional level and the lack of follow-through on a city level.

The city seems to have no consolidated approach to the business community. More collaboration with local chambers of commerce and other business organizations is crucial. Improving the business climate in South Lake Tahoe is of paramount importance because it drives the financial health of community.

What have you done to help South Lake Tahoe be a better community?

I'm running for City Council because I want to move from the sidelines onto the field to actually improve our town. Currently, I chair the city's Sustainability Commission. But my involvement with the South Shore community goes back 17 years. I have done everything from volunteering at community events to picking up trash along our waterways. I have mentored high school students, sat on the St. Theresa's school board, establish the high school newspaper and coached Odyssey of the Mind teams. I helped organize a successful film festival with the American Film Institute and built an online issues forum on local concerns. I have hosted fundraisers for arts organizations and youth sports, and donated my time and resources to numerous other organizations. I have served up Christmas dinners to the hungry and marched for gay marriage. I have been involved in all manner of commissions, committees, coalitions and collaborations. In other words, I have been deeply involved with helping make South Lake Tahoe a better

community since I claimed this city as my own in 1993.

What boards, commissions, or other experience do you have?

This seems a bit redundant after my previous answer but let me list a few:

- City of South Lake Tahoe Sustainability Commission
- Tahoe Transportation District Board
- Tahoe Douglas Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors
- Citizens Advisory Panel for the Upper Truckee River–California Tahoe Conservancy
- Lake Tahoe AIDS Task Force Board of Directors
- Lake Tahoe Film Festival Board of Directors
- St. Theresa's Catholic School Advisory Commission
- Adjunct professor at Lake Tahoe Community College
- Recent recipient of a master's degree in environmental journalism from the University of Nevada, Reno that focused on Lake Tahoe environmental issues

Why should voters vote for you over someone else?

I am a good listener and believe that hearing from the community is the first step to making good decisions. I am an independent thinker with a real understanding of all the issues facing the city and the Tahoe basin. I understand that blue can be green: We can reach a balance between our environmental and economic prosperity.

As the editor of the local newspaper and through my project work, I know the people, positions and posturing of various entities and am not afraid to stand up for what I believe is in the best interest of the city.

I have no hidden agenda, nor am I beholden to any special interest. I will not benefit financially from this position, nor will my family.

Quite simply, I am a 17-year resident of South Lake Tahoe who is passionate about rebuilding a thriving community and developing a first class eco-resort.

BlueGo, the public transit, is mired in lawsuits and bankruptcy. Do we need public transit on the South Shore? If so, how do you propose to make it functional?

Yes, we need some form of public transportation, but what form that takes really depends on what is economically viable. As most of the information on BlueGo has not been available for public inspection, I am not in a position to determine what is best for the organization. But I would consider this a high priority since many city residents rely on BlueGo for their daily transportation needs.

Do you support commercial air service at Lake Tahoe Airport? Why or why not?

Yes, I support commercial air service at Lake Tahoe in the manner that has been dictated by the litigation settlement agreement. That means no more than 10 flights a day, with around 125 passengers per flight and a noise level that is equivalent to a vacuum cleaner. Commercial air service could generate more than \$50 million a year for our area with little impact on the environment. I don't think we can afford to let that revenue just fly away.

Is there any individual, group or organization you would not take campaign money from? Why?

Not so far, so please send a check.

I would not take money from any organization or group that I felt operated illegally or expected that a check would trade

for a vote. Otherwise, the public needs to understand that running a campaign is a costly endeavor.

Nepotism and favoritism runs rampant in the city when it comes to hiring preferences. The council sets policy. What type of policy would you write regarding nepotism and favoritism?

Again, that's an issue that I can't begin to address in a short paragraph. In general, I believe that nepotism can create a hostile work environment and create unnecessary alliances. But I have no real idea, and won't until I am on council, the extent of the problem and how to fix it. Certainly there can be no direct reports or inappropriate influences. Our citizens deserve a city organization with the highest ethical standards and I will work toward that end.

You and three other council candidates met with the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce. Then you and two others were invited back for a follow-up meeting. Tell us about that meeting.

I welcome the opportunity to meet with any group in town. As for the chamber, I was not invited to meet with them. As a matter of fact, I attended my first chamber meeting [Sept. 16]. I was asked to address a group of business people, many of whom I didn't know, on where I stood on a number of local issues. It was the same type of invitation I received recently from the Carpenters Union. Hopefully, other groups will be inviting me as well.

What makes you more committed to this run for council than in 2002 when you dropped out and your name was left on the ballot?

My circumstances have changed in many ways. I am no longer running a busy local business. I am no longer raising two preteen boys who required dinner daily, rides to soccer and other sports, and help on their homework. And I have a spouse whose employment is not dependent on the decisions I make on

behalf of the city.

Tell us something about yourself that voters don't already know:

At my first event as editor of the *Tahoe Daily Tribune*, I was asked to sing in front the joint event of the chambers of commerce. My song choice was "Please Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood." I am still taking requests.