

SLT council candidates ask each other questions

By Kathryn Reed

Losing a bit of the rhetoric and staid questions posed to the South Lake Tahoe City Council candidates this election season, at Thursday's forum they were allowed to ask an opponent a question.

Doug Cichowicz asked Steve Kubby what he thinks the percentage of the people using marijuana collectives is abusing the system.



SLT council candidates address an audience Oct. 14 of more than four dozen.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

Kubby didn't answer the question forthright, but instead said he doesn't want Proposition 215, which he helped write, be abused or be a shield for criminals.

Kubby also said in reference to young people coming and going from the establishments, "I also like to say one reason

everyone looks healthy is because it's working."

Alice Jones asked Tom Davis why in fiscal years 2003-04 and 2004-05 the city didn't spend money on roads, yet the Public Works Department's payroll was fully funded without cutbacks.

Davis said he couldn't recall decisions from six years ago when he was on the council, but added snow removal is part of the roads and that was funded.

Adrian Gooch asked Davis how many hours a council member needs to spend doing the job.

He said between 30 and 50 hours a week.

Claire Fortier asked Liz Hallen how she expects to bring a younger element to town.

Hallen said it's already happening. She spoke of small businesses like her Hot Gossip Coffee and others providing what locals need and want; and that she would be the voice for the young, small business person.

Kubby asked Jones what she thought of Davis' answer to her question.

Jones said she doesn't personally fault Davis for the roads, but pointed to the need to have someone like herself who is a certified public accountant to be on the council to better understand budgets and the city's 79 separate funds.

Joy Curry asked Jones how she expects to put in the necessary time for the council when she is a mother with a full time job outside the home.

Jones said she has plans in place to make it work, including speaking to her employer, but said getting elected needs to happen before she reorganizes her life.

Angela Swanson wanted to know from Hallen how people could

trust her to enforce the rules of the city when her campaign signs are placed illegally.

Hallen said she has not placed signs illegally and that it could be others who support her, including her husband, who may have gotten overzealous.

Davis asked Kubby if he supports Proposition 19, the Nov. 2 initiative to legalize marijuana in California, and how it will affect dispensaries in South Lake Tahoe.

Kubby supports the proposition, saying language in it protects the collectives and that the new law should not affect them.

Hallen asked Davis if the rule preventing the city from assessing Heavenly Mountain Resort a surcharge on gondola ticket sales could be reversed and how to prevent something like that from happening in the future.

Davis said he advocated for a \$1 surcharge for the gondola for the city, but his colleagues on the council nixed that idea.

More than 50 people turned out for the Oct. 14 forum.

In 18 days voters will go to the polls to pick three candidates for the council. None of the incumbents is running. Nine of the 10 candidates spent about two hours at Inn by the Lake answering questions. Géorg May did not attend.

The four prepared questions the candidates were sent ahead of time were geared toward the interests of the sponsors – South Tahoe Association of Realtors and South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association. *Lake Tahoe News* was the other sponsor.

Question: The subject of vacation rentals within the city of South Lake Tahoe has been a prominent topic for the City Council in the past few years. What is your perception of the issues surrounding vacation rentals and what are your thoughts on them?

Hallen: Favors moratorium on number of vacation rentals. Wants to track them, enforce rules and recover taxes owed.

Davis: Believes in free enterprise, having started Tahoe Keys Vacation Rentals years ago. Thinks everyone should follow the rules, including those renting off the Internet.

Swanson: Need to have vacation rentals and hotels. Noise and garbage are issues. Sees an issue with people not using rental agencies as difficult to collect taxes from.

Curry: Sees rentals as valuable part of transient occupancy tax equation. Wants to control noise and trash.

Kubby: Doesn't favor moratorium. Would like to see less government. Believes rules on the books are sufficient.

Fortier: In a perfect world, she would like all housing to be residents and all lodging for tourists. She questions if TOT is being collected, citing three homes in her neighborhood that are not paying. Wants bear boxes mandatory on vacation rentals. Wants to look into these rentals being part of the Tourism Improvement District.

Gooch: This was the most difficult question for her – to balance the \$1.2 million in TOT vacation rentals bring in annually v. losing the sense of community in a neighborhood. She would consider a moratorium.

Jones: She points to working for the Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association, knowing occupancy is down for rentals. She said the way to increase property values is to increase occupancy, but to increase occupancy visitors need to have a good experience in South Lake Tahoe. Riding on pothole filled streets and contending with other aging infrastructure is not a good experience. She said the city has never reached out to the TKPOA to help with TOT enforcement. She thinks the city needs to work more collaboratively with partner agencies – like getting South Tahoe Refuse to be able to collect trash on

Sundays when all the visitors from the rentals are leaving town and their trash behind.

Cichowicz: Trash is his biggest concern. Also sees need to have STR open seven days.

Question: There has been recent discussion of using city of South Lake Tahoe tourist accommodation unit (TAU) allocations for use outside of the city limits. What are your thoughts on city limit TAUs being sold outside of the city limits?

Kubby: He calls TAUs fraud and a fictitious metric. He wants the city to override the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Fortier: Agrees TAUs are fraudulent. Wants city to pay attention as TRPA goes forward with Regional Plan and make sure TAU discussion benefits the city.

Gooch: While employed by the city she compiled the report the city uses for TAU policy. She called it a "somewhat stupid" issue. She wants to be able to trade TAUs for commercial floor area. Does not support banning TAUs from going outside the city.

Jones: Believes she needs more education on TAUs, but is concerned with the idea of the city selling an asset because of "potential pitfall of favoritism".

Cichowicz: Needs more info about TAUs, and until then would hold off on selling them.

Curry: Wants TRPA to redefine TAU from it being a bedroom to it being a unit. If they are sold outside the city, she wants something tangible in return like work force housing or roads.

Swanson: Believes current definition of TAU is "arcane and insane". Wants to be able to trade TAUs for CFA. Wants to look at big picture before selling TAUs to know where the city is headed.

Davis: Would like TAUs for CFA so the latter could be used as incentives to get businesses to make improvements like what happened at the old Crescent V Center.

Hallen: Not well versed in TAUs. Would support selling them if it financially benefits the city.

Question: The city of South Lake Tahoe in past years has supported the tourism community through funding of marketing and special events. How would you envision the city supporting tourism, marketing and special events in the future?

Gooch: Supports city's decision years ago to stop writing blank check to tourism related entities in order to balance its own books. Believes city should support tourism when it can afford to do so and for things that are explained in detail.

Jones: Believes if city focuses on core services – transportation, roads, lighting – this will provide climate where tourists will want to come back instead of how it is now.

Cichowicz: Wants an event in town every weekend. Would support them financially if possible.

Hallen: Wants to be four-season town and lose the shoulder seasons; be more family friendly so the bowling alley isn't the only place she recommends people go.

Davis: Wants city to provide in-kind support through things like police services. Would support special events if financially possible. Wants to make sure town is clean and bike paths are repaired.

Swanson: Pointed to history and the distrust it fostered with TOT collection-allocation. Wants city to be viable partner. She was "embarrassed" the city was not part of the inaugural Sample the Sierra in August.

Curry: Wants an amusement fee on the Tahoe Queen and would-be convention center of a dollar or two paid by the tourists that could be used to supplement the Lake Tahoe Visitor Authority's \$4 million budget.

Kubby: Agrees with Davis that bringing more ski events to Heavenly is a good idea. Wants events at Heavenly Village, but points to the vacancies there and parking garage that is expensive and loses money each year. Believes a good job is being done to get people to town, but wants to work on the experience they have once here.

Fortier: Also pointed to the past with council raising TOT but then taking it away from marketing. Wants to be partner in tourism, most likely with in-kind help. Wants infrastructure improvements to bring South Tahoe into world-class destination status.

Question: Citizens are concerned about enforcement and sense of standards for cleanliness and common sense trash containment around town. What do you propose as solutions to rid our city of blight – both commercial and residential?

Swanson: Need to work on large trash bins at businesses being out front. Wants to work on culture at city because she is running into residents who are afraid to talk to staff about making improvements to their home or business.

Davis: Wants STR to maintain dumpsters. Also would like youth to paint them at businesses like what has been on utility owned structures.

Hallen: She wants property owners to have reasonable lease agreements to small businesses and survive, which in turn will help bring the 17 percent unemployment rate down.

Cichowicz: Does not favor more regulations, but would rather see better communication with absentee homeowners to ensure their property is taken care of.

Jones: Believes the city needs to lead by example by taking care of its property and then individuals and businesses will follow suit. Pointed out it's hard to want to improve a parking lot leading to dilapidated city infrastructure. Wants to work on franchise agreement with South Tahoe Refuse. Wants recycling bins everywhere.

Gooch: Pointed to grant city recently receive to obtain 15 dumpsters. Hesitant to support mandatory commercial trash service.

Fortier: Would like grant through STR to buy bear boxes for vacation rentals that those owners would pay back through time via their bills. Agrees with Jones that Sunday trash pick up for vacation rentals is logical. Suggests twice a year city has day to clean up trash that community could participate in like Coastal Cleanup Day.

Kubby: Wants world-class services so this isn't an issue.

Curry: Wants vacation rentals and new construction to have bear boxes. Believes redevelopment and Tahoe Valley Community Plan will take care of blight.

The election is Nov. 2. Mail ballots have already arrived for those voters.