

Crash course on S. Tahoe inner workings for council-elect

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe's three incoming City Council members got a taste Thursday of what it is going to be like once they are sworn in Dec. 14 for their four-year term.

Walk into council chambers at Lake Tahoe Airport with a clear schedule for the day because you don't know how long the meeting will last. That was one lesson. The 9am meeting was supposed to be done about noon. It was over closer to 2:30pm.

Don't expect the agenda to follow what's printed. In the case of the Dec. 2 meeting, public safety moved up three spots to accommodate Police Chief Brian Uhler needing to be at another meeting.



Angela Swanson, Tom Davis, Claire Fortier

This was the first of two initiation sessions for Claire Fortier, Tom Davis and Angela Swanson. The Dec. 2 meeting was all about getting a lesson on open meeting laws, who may talk to whom when, what is considered a gift and if it can be

accepted or needs to be declared. It was also about all the department heads sharing what is going on and their concerns.

Next week's get-together is with outside agencies which are partners with the city so the three have an idea of who else is in the sandbox.

Fire Chief Lorenzo Gigliotti was after Uhler. This led to another lesson. It can take multiple questions by a councilmember to get an answer to the first question.

Councilwoman-elect Swanson wanted to know more about the ladder truck that was supposed to be bought through Redevelopment Agency funds once Lake Tahoe Development Company was given its building permits for the now bankrupt convention center near Stateline.

Gigliotti didn't have an answer for why the city didn't receive its money before developer Randy Lane filed for bankruptcy in October 2009. What was revealed is the original price tag to replace the 26-year-old outdated ladder truck was \$675,000. With California law changing, the vehicle now costs \$800,000 – and it would not fit into any of the fire stations.

The city worked the ladder truck into the original agreement because it would be needed to fight a fire at the center. Now it's possible the city will lobby to get a firehouse built with mitigation funds from whatever might rise from the rebar and concrete.

But, still, no funding exists for the ladder truck. Gigliotti's first answer, when pressed by Swanson about how to fund it, was to tax property owners. The second idea was to up the transient occupancy tax.

This discussion all came after Finance Director Christine Vuletich detailed what a sorry state of affairs the city's finances are in – which isn't news.

"The days of wine and roses are over and I don't anticipate them coming back soon," City Manager Tony O'Rourke said.

He said it is possible to use the operating reserve one more year as a stopgap measure before dipping below the 25 percent threshold, which is about \$8 million.

"Our biggest problem is a complete infrastructure deficit," O'Rourke said.

A sign of the economy improving is the peak unemployment of 18.1 percent for South Lake in spring 2010 has dropped to 15.9 percent in October.

Councilwoman-elect Fortier, who is touted to be the next mayor pro tem, asked if the drop relates to those people not living in town anymore.

To this, Vuletich said, "It could be."

She had no reason why unemployment numbers are changing.

The general fund is expected to have a deficit of \$2 million to \$3 million for the next five years.

Vuletich spoke a bit about the five-year budget plan O'Rourke has told her and others to come up with. She expects a report and plan to be presented to the council in February.