

S. Lake alters nepotism policy; snowy paths OK this winter

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe is inching toward recognizing it needs to do something regarding nepotism. But the bigger policy issue regarding employees will not be brought to the council until February or March.

A revision to the basic nepotism policy was before the council Dec. 14. What was altered is the code of ethics that had been passed in 1992.



“The resolution prohibits City Council members from appointing any of their relatives to a City Commission or to the position of City Manager or City Attorney. The Resolution does not affect the employment, promotion, or retention of employees,” Deputy City Attorney Nira Feeley wrote in her staff report.

The council approved the revision 4-0, with Bruce Grego being absent for the entire meeting except for joining via teleconference to vote on the mayor and mayor pro tem.

Grego weighed-in on the subject via a letter he wrote that City Clerk Suzie Alessi read into the record. In part it said, “We should select individuals to participate in our local government based upon merit. Depriving certain individuals from participating in local government based upon their ‘relative’ status is no different than depriving such individual from participating based upon their race, national origin, religion, sexual preference, sex, age and the other bases of discrimination that we all reject.”

Grego's wife, Geri, is on the Planning Commission. The adoption of this rule will prohibit her from being on it.

Councilwoman Claire Fortier and Mayor Hal Cole stated how perceptions of a pipeline of power or influence need to be avoided even if relatives believe they can act independently of the other.

Councilman Tom Davis relayed how his son wants to be on the Airport Commission, but will be denied that opportunity. The elder Davis is OK with that to adhere to the policy and the ideals of promoting more transparency within city hall.

Councilwoman Angela Swanson pointed out how there are plenty of other ways for relatives to be active in the community and have leadership roles other than by being on a city commission.

The issue of nepotism was brought up in the 2010 El Dorado County Grand Jury Report. It's a topic the outgoing City Council and former city manager swept under the carpet.

Lake Tahoe News in July published an article about nepotism in the city. The effort to figure out who is related to whom has been difficult because the city will not turn that information over.

After *LTN* initially requested the information, Human Resources Director Janet Emmett sent an email to the related employees telling them about the request. That document is public information, but the city is not disclosing the full list of recipients.

When City Attorney Patrick Enright sent the email, he wrote, "Attached is a list of the bcc on the email that was provided to you. The ones redacted are mostly police officers who (sic) names were redacted under Penal Code section 832.8. There is one couple that has a 'confidential marriage,' which is specifically exempt as a Public Record."

So, it is still unknown how many full-time, part-time or seasonal/temporary employees are related to one another. Just being related does not present a conflict. Current policy prohibits someone from supervising a relative. However, relatives in the workplace can present conflicts for other employees. That is the part that has yet to be addressed by the city and it supposed to be next year.

Although the seven bargaining units in the city don't have to agree with what staff and eventually the council will vote on, they are being given the opportunity to review the policy before it becomes law. That is why it will be months before it sees the light of day.

"As to city employees, the city needs to meet and confer with the employee unions, which we are in the process of doing at this time. Staff is hopeful that in the next two months a comprehensive policy can be brought to the council," Enright told *Lake Tahoe News*.

In other action Dec. 14:

- The council adopted the ordinance to mandate businesses clear their sidewalks of snow, but the start date was altered to Sept. 1, 2011, so outreach can be done to educate people. As originally written, the enforcement was to begin Jan. 1. The city ordinance puts some teeth into what already is state law.
- A fee increase per the 2007 franchise agreement with South Tahoe Refuse was approved 3-1, with Tom Davis voting no. Because it is a contractual item it really didn't matter how the vote went. STR customers in the city limits will have rates go up 35 cents a month starting Jan. 1.
- Police Lt. Marty Hale was recognized for his years of service. He retires at the end of the month, though will continue on on a limited basis for the first six months of 2011. He was given a standing ovation.

- The three new councilmembers were sworn in, as were the city treasurer and city clerk.