

South Tahoe asks employees, citizens what they want

By Kathryn Reed

This month results of two surveys administered by South Lake Tahoe will be released.



In December employees of the city were asked to answer 71 questions from five categories – communications within the city, my supervisor, my work group, quality of the work environment, and the city as an employer.

City Manager Tony O'Rourke said he could not find any evidence of such a survey being done in the 45 years the city has been incorporated.

"We will have action plans for the survey results within 30 days of the findings," O'Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Department heads and manager will be accountable to make the changes."

Bill Chiat, a consultant with Alta Mesa Group, is spearheading the process for both surveys. He is expected to share the employee survey results with department heads in mid-January.

Although there were rumors polls were being taken after the employee sessions, *Lake Tahoe News* could find no evidence of this to be true. Employees could talk to each other about how they answered the questions, but neither the unions nor management organized any strategy to gauge results prior to them being collated by the consultant.

More than 90 percent of employees took the survey, O'Rourke said.

Results from the community survey will be available later this month, with the goal of having at least the raw data for when the City Council has its strategic planning session the afternoon of Jan. 25.

Drilling down to compare South Tahoe's data to cities of similar size will take some time, with that analysis possibly not available until February. The last time a citizen survey was taken was 2008. Almost the identical questions were asked so the city can make comparisons to responses.

Nearly 3,000 surveys were sent to a random selection of residential addresses. Questions start with ranking quality of life in South Lake Tahoe and end with items about the budget.

There are 22 questions, but many are multi-dimensional, so it's really longer than that.

O'Rourke is interested to see if the 69 percent who ranked the aesthetics of the town fair to poor in 2008 feel the same way.

"Clearly that issue has been raised in the past and has not been addressed," he said.

The cost of the two surveys is about \$16,000 combined, which comes out of the professional services budget. O'Rourke would like such surveys to be a line item in future budgets. He intends to conduct surveys annually to track trends.

"I'm not overly concerned what the issues are. The focus needs to be addressing them. The focus needs to be on the process of constantly improving, not laying blame and retribution," O'Rourke said. "No matter how good we think we are there are opportunities for improvement."

Here is the employee survey and the citizen survey, as well as the 2008 survey results.