

Opinion: TRPA work was much more than a slideshow

By Claire Fortier

Recently, the League to Save Lake Tahoe has called my integrity into question. At issue is whether I disclosed my company's income from TRPA in the 12 months prior to my appointment to the TRPA Governing Board.

The answer is simple: There was no income.

But nothing in Tahoe is simple.



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Here's the story: In November 2009, Dennis Oliver, then the public relations officer for the TRPA, asked me to go through some 20 boxes of documents that the TRPA received from the El Dorado County Library. He wanted me to pull key documents and catalogue the rest for a TRPA's 40th anniversary project.

At the time, he had the lofty ambition of putting together an extensive website where anyone could access historic documents and news stories about the TRPA. He also asked me to work with him on a 24-page book on the history of the agency.

In December 2009, my company sent a written proposal to the TRPA to do that job, as well as extensive online research. For those who don't know me, I make my living as a writer and researcher.

I spent countless hours in the TRPA basement, pulling documents, studies and news stories collected by the library over 60 years. It was glamorous and exciting work. I then spent hours online, tracking down documents and news stories. Even more exciting stuff.

All my information was turned over to Dennis Oliver during my final meeting with him in January 2010.

But the mechanics of getting the information online, which wasn't my job, was simply too costly and time consuming. The TRPA nixed the idea of the book and the website, instead using some of the information in an extensive PowerPoint presentation.

The presentation that the Lake Tahoe News linked on its website was not my work. It was Dennis Oliver's project for the TRPA's 40th anniversary. All of my research, as well as the outline for the book, are available to anyone who provides me with a disc.

Who would have thought that a year and almost a month after that project I would be an elected City Council member appointed by council to sit on the TRPA Governing Board?

I certainly didn't as I sat on a hard concrete floor, dusting off spider webs and going through more mind-numbing documents than a person should read in a lifetime. If I had, I probably would have insisted on a chair.

The *Tahoe Mountain News* has demeaned the attempt by the League to discredit me as a "pissing match" between Rochelle Nason and me. But I have a different word for it -bullying.

While the League is well within its rights to check all Governing Board members' disclosure forms, it seems only mine was of interest. In addition, the League has filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the TRPA for all correspondence and emails between the TRPA and me.

Is this a pissing match or an unabashed attempt by the League to intimidate me?

In my opinion, the League would like to discredit me because I have called into question its intent, its tactics and its membership.

Repeated requests by the city and other organizations to get a roster of the League members, its finances and board member affiliations have been ignored or rebuffed. Even requests to attend League board meetings are denied because, as Ms. Nason said during our last City Council meeting, "we spend most of the meeting talking about litigation."

Shouldn't the League pledge to the same transparency that it demands of other Tahoe agencies and jurisdictions?

As City Council stated in a letter to the League board: "The League has blocked timely and economically feasible solutions to critical environmental problems. Further, the League's use of confrontation through veiled threats of litigation or its eleventh-hour demands for more information or study have made collaboration all but impossible. The League's demands are costly, time-consuming and unnecessary."

It is my strong belief that the time has come to challenge the League and its stranglehold over the TRPA Governing Board. It's time to put the League under the same microscope that it has put just about every plan, project or person that has come to the forefront at Lake Tahoe.

Claire Fortier is on the South Lake Tahoe City Council and is the city's representative to the Governing Board of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.