

Tahoe's population may change power in Placerville

By Kathryn Reed

For the last 10 years the South Shore of El Dorado County has had one voice in Placerville on the Board of Supervisors.

The previous decade it had two reps, with one living in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

What the next decade will look like is being discussed. At a meeting in South Lake Tahoe on May 19, county officials went over the five proposals they have come up with. Ultimately it will be up to the Board of Supervisors to decide how the district lines are drawn.



County
Surveyor Rich
Briner
discusses
redistricting
options.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

Les Lovell pointed out that perhaps this board should not be the one to make the decision because it's possible they would not actually have a district to represent based on how the lines might be drawn.

While the law allows a supervisor to finish his or her term, he or she might have to move to be in a district they really want to represent come the next election.

This could be the scenario for Supervisor Norma Santiago who lives in South Lake Tahoe, but represents the entire basin. Some of the proposals have the South Shore being split. Santiago wants to keep the basin its own district.

Though it's true the five electeds represent the entire county, they are voted into office by the people in their respective districts – thus the assumption certain people represent certain areas.

While politics is not supposed to be a criterion for how district boundaries are drawn, that has not historically been the case here or other places in the country. All one has to do is look at how the lines were drawn with a little population bubble on the West Slope that benefitted then-Supervisor Helen Baumann. At that time she had the Meyers portion of the South Shore in District 4.

Even Bruce Grego, the lone South Lake Tahoe councilmember to attend the meeting, wanted politics to be part of the process. He said voter registration should be a criterion.

He was told that's not legal.

Grego also believes Tahoe would be better off with two voices in Placerville.

What the U.S. Constitution says is population equality is of utmost importance when it comes to parceling out districts. This would have each of El Dorado's five districts having 36,212 residents.

Based on 2010 Census data, this is how the current districts stand:

District 1 pop 38,670 (2,458 over target)

District 2 pop 44,434 (8,222 over target)

District 3 pop 32,010 (4,202 under target)

District 4 pop 35,198 (1,014 under target)

District 5 pop 30,746 (5,466 under target).

(District 5 is Lake Tahoe.)

Depending on how the lines are drawn and who is elected in the future, Tahoe could have one or two reps on the board and neither would have to live in the basin.

Only 20 people showed for a meeting that ultimately will have political consequences for everyone living in El Dorado County.

While the back of the council chambers were covered with maps outlining five proposals, county officials were quick to say they don't believe one of them will be the final one. They expect public input and comments from the supervisors to help massage the final map.

Rich Briner, county surveyor, said alternatives 4 and 5 are more like what the county had in the 1990s. He described No. 3 as one people hate or love.

"I would be surprised if any one of them is accepted by the board. I believe all will be tweaked," Briner said.

Another unknown is if El Dorado Hills will be incorporated in the future. In 2006 the attempt to do so failed. But momentum is growing to bring it back for another vote. This would make it the third incorporated city in the county and the largest population-wise, thus significantly shifting the power base.

It's almost a given El Dorado Hills will be split in representation to divvy up its population.

More information about the proposals, including maps, and a

form to make comments are on the county's website. Comments will be accepted through the first week of June.

Supervisors are expected to tackle the issue in late June, with a final decision made later in the summer.

On a larger scale, California is the first state to have a citizens committee draw the lines for federal offices. To learn more about that, go online.