

# S. Tahoe wants to divide lobbying work between 2 firms

By Kathryn Reed

As important as Lake Tahoe is, when it comes to power in the Legislature, South Lake Tahoe is rather inconsequential.



Hiring two lobbyists is what the South Lake Tahoe City Council believes will bring the city more clout, money and a seat at the table with people in Sacramento.

Three lobbying firms on Tuesday were interviewed in public by the council. The Houston Group, which has been the city's firm of choice for the past several years, is essentially being fired.

California Strategies and Suter, Wallauch, Corbett & Associates are the two firms left standing. With each having different strengths and weaknesses, it was the council's belief the combo would do better than flying solo with one.

Staff is going to talk to both firms to see if they would reduce their monthly rates based on the scope of work being scaled back. The council also wants to know specifics about work they would do instead of the more broad, generalities that were presented Tuesday.

South Tahoe High grad Tony Brunello gave the bulk of California Strategies' presentation, while Lynn Suter touted her firm's abilities.

Brunello spoke of his company's breadth, including the seven offices encompassing 26 partners. Their proposed rate is

\$8,500 a month. The city is going to ask for it to be reduced to \$6,000.

Suter is the Senate's appointee to the California Tahoe Conservancy board. She said to avoid a conflict she would not vote on CTC grants involving the city. Considering South Tahoe is a major component of the CTC, a lot of recusing could be in Suter's future.

Her firm's client list is predominately other cities in California. South Tahoe Public Utility District is also a client and Suter came highly recommended from the district.

Suter came in with a monthly rate of \$4,500. The city is going to ask that be reduced to \$2,000.

South Tahoe wants to have a voice in Sacramento to better procure funding for roads, be on the inside when legislation is being talked about that would affect the area, and to have easy access to lawmakers who are making decisions that affect the basin.

Getting South Tahoe's designation of being a rural community changed to metropolitan is another objective the city wants a lobbyist to work on. This would put the city in a better position to obtain more transportation dollars. Based on the number of tourists accessing the roads – especially with a highway going through the center of town – the wear and tear is not that of a town with a steady population of 25,000 people.

The council is expected to revisit the lobbyist issue at the July 12 meeting.

**In other action:**

- The council allocated \$65,000 from the asset forfeiture fund to upgrade the dispatch radio system for the police department.

- The Sustainability Commission's request to have all city sponsored events use South Tahoe Refuse's special event recycling program, with the goal to have zero waste events, was granted.
- All agreed with Councilman Bruce Grego that communication with Nevada lawmakers needs to continue to ensure what they deem as progress regarding the revamping of TRPA through SB271 does not lose steam.
- An ad hoc committee of Councilwomen Claire Fortier and Angela Swanson was created to deal with California legislative issues. A working plan and name for the committee is expected at the July 12 meeting.
- The June 30 meeting with Douglas County will be rescheduled – possibly in September.