

# South Tahoe budget subject of special meeting

By Kathryn Reed

Instead of creating the potential for another marathon council day, South Lake Tahoe's 2011-12 budget will be discussed at a special meeting Sept. 15 at 7pm.

The regular meeting is Sept. 13 at 9am. Both are at Lake Tahoe Airport.



Public input will be taken at the budget meeting, but it's possible the council could approve it that night. This has been an unusual budget season in that Thursday will be the first time the document will have been seen by the public and discussed by the council in public.

The next fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

It's projected the council will be asked to eliminate close to 30 positions. Some involve not filling positions vacated by retirements or other changes, while about 22 are actual people who will lose their jobs.

Because of union-city agreement the people being added to the 16.7 percent unemployment rate in the city must be given 30-days notice before being terminated.

While the city is still looking at eliminating the three division chief positions in the fire department, technically negotiations are in mediation after having gone to impasse. But because the three are at-will employees in an association – not a union – the city can eliminate their positions with a stroke of the pen.

The three have hired an attorney to represent them, but negotiations are not getting far, according to both sides.

The only union to date to make concessions in terms of health care and pension contributions is the firefighters whose ranks are captain and below. In the budget is a 2 percent raise for this group as a reward for working with the city.

City employees have told *Lake Tahoe News* off the record they don't believe their unions are representing them as a group, but instead favoring certain people. These individuals, who would not allow their names to be printed for fear of retribution, plan to go to the council soon to express their desire to take the cuts necessary to balance the budget while keeping their job.

The city has a \$5.2 million budget gap it needs to close by the end of the month.

Even if employees were to agree to the proposals by the city that would save \$1.5 million through pension and health care changes, layoffs would be necessary because of the ever-increasing budget deficit.

It has been known since early spring that if the employee groups don't help defray costs – \$1 million a year in savings if they pay their PERS and \$500,000 with health care changes – jobs will be lost.

The main issues on the regular Tuesday council agenda pertain to the ever divisive and unenforced sign ordinance.