

Kortge: Time to replace aging infrastructure is now

Publisher's note: Lake Tahoe News is profiling the six candidates who will be on the Nov. 8 ballot for the South Tahoe Public Utility District board. They are being published in the order they were submitted. Mary Kortge is running for the seat vacated by Marylou Mosbacher.

Name: Mary Kortge

Age: As of Oct. 15 I will be 54.

How long have you lived on the South Shore?: 22 years

What water company supplies your home? Your work?: South Tahoe Public Utility District



Mary Kortge

Job/profession?: Homemaker/manage my rental property

What stands out to you in the 2011-12 budget?: The significant amount of proposed construction planned for this year since the construction cost are lower now. Also, that more money goes toward capital expenditures (40 percent) than wages and salaries (30 percent) and operations and maintenance (30 percent).

What boards, commissions, or other experience, including

volunteering, do you have?: College degree in accounting/computer science, Zilwaukee Township clerk in Saginaw, Mich., School Site Councils for eight years, PTA boards for nine years, managed at AT&T phone centers, National Ski Patrol host at Sierra-at-Tahoe, the experience I've learned being married to my husband of 25 years in the engineering field from building bridges, dams and water treatment plants.

Is there any individual, group or organization you would not take campaign money from? Why?: I'm paying for my own campaign.

What is the No. 1 reason someone should vote for you over another candidate?: I know I am qualified for the position. I have reviewed the board's past minutes, with a range of experience from the field to the boardroom, I will listen to your concerns and be your representation on the board. If elected, especially during these tough economic times, I will work hard to ensure that budgets are spent wisely and effectively.

California law mandates water meters be installed. What is your solution to make the fee equitable for those on meters and those without one?: It's sad things couldn't have remained the same as they were in the past, but state law mandated the water meters. In a perfect world no residents would be charged until all the meters have been installed, however, state law has dictated that owners be charged once the meters are in place. There is no way for it to be fair for everyone until all the meters are installed. The district needs to continue their efforts to find grants to pay for the rest of the water meters.

To get the remaining 60 percent of South Tahoe PUD customers on meters it will cost \$15 million. As a board member, where will you get the money to pay for the meters?: We have a wonderful grant writer at STPUD and hopefully we will get more

grant money to pay for the meters so we don't have to pass it on to the public.

Do you believe the district should spend money on lobbying efforts in Sacramento and/or Washington, D.C.? Why or why not?: Yes, we should pay for lobbying in Washington, D.C. The water district spends about \$70,000 a year for our lobbyist, which in turn since 2009 we've received about \$6.5 million in grants from the federal government appropriated for water system improvements . Dennis Cocking who works for STPUD does the Sacramento lobbying, is very well known with the state and can accomplish any lobbying that has to be done at the state level.

What do you know about STPUD getting money from the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act?: The district has benefited from the act and if the money is to be spent in Lake Tahoe we might as well benefit. The money from the act was used to improve infrastructure including installation of fire hydrants. Due to the federal funding of the act, these improvements were made without increasing our water rates.

How do you balance the economic situation of the community with the infrastructure needs of the district?: In the lean economic down turn it is the best time to do public works projects. It's time now to replace or repair our ailing infrastructure. We should continue to improve the infrastructure of the firefighting system. We should take advantage of the competitive construction bidding now since bids are coming in below our estimates. Minimizing the cost helps keep our rates low.

With 38 percent of a customer's sewer bill going to meet the needs of the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Act and \$100 million already invested in Alpine County to take STPUD's wastewater, would you leave things as they are? If yes, why? If no, what would you change and how do expect to accomplish those changes?: Leave things the way they are since the

infrastructure we have today is the result of federal and state laws. STPUD is working on energy self-production to keep our expenses down.

What should be done with the land STPUD owns where the old post office was on Black Bart?: Since the old post office does not have water or sewer there is not much you can do with the building except storage. Possibly remove the building, reclaim the coverage to bank for future construction, and revegetate the land. If an interested buyer could be found, it would have to be rezoned at some expense, making this a poor alternative.

There has been a three-year wage freeze for employees. What are your thoughts on employee raises and benefits?: The economy would have to change before I could consider a change in the employees' wages. The water district is a very distinguished employer in our basin. I think the employees are happy to be working for our water district.

When would you vote for a hike on water and sewer rates and why?: At this time I could not vote for an increase given the current economy.

Lukins Brothers Water District – any comments?: Lukins system is old and in need of upgrades. It is a complicated issue that affects many South Lake Tahoe residents, so I will weigh the benefits and burdens of the different alternatives to make a fair and economically sound decision.

What should be the main priority of South Tahoe PUD?: To provide clean drinking water and sewage removal for the public at the lowest rate they can. Continue to improve the infrastructure for firefighting in the basin.

What should be the main priority of a South Tahoe PUD board member?: To make the best decision on the best information you can get to benefit the greatest number of the district customers.

Tell readers something about yourself that most people don't know: I'm in the process of becoming a member of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary. I also will be proud to have people call me STPUD.