

Sheehan: Balance economics with infrastructure needs

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. Kelly Sheehan is challenging the incumbent.*

Name: Kelly Sheehan

Age: 53

How long have you lived on the South Shore?: 30 years

What water company supplies your home? Your work?: STPUD supplies my residence, two rental properties and my business – Steamers Bar & Grill.



Kelly Sheehan

Job/profession?: Owner-manager of Steamers Bar & Grill since 2008. Previously a branch manager of a locally owned savings bank for 25 years.

What stands out to you in the 2011-12 budget?: That STPUD does not pay lifetime medical insurance for its retired employees. This is a huge cost that is causing huge financial deficits for many states, counties, cities, and special districts.

What boards, commissions, or other experience, including volunteering, do you have?: I have served two terms on the St. Theresa school board, two terms on the St. Theresa's Pastoral Council and I am currently on St. Theresa's finance committee.

Is there any individual, group or organization you would not take campaign money from? Why?: I will take campaign donations from any group or constituent as long as long as they do not expect any "special favors" in return.

What is the No. 1 reason someone should vote for you over another candidate?: I am a fresh set of eyes and ears. I have no special agenda and will base my decisions on fact and what is best for the district and its customers.

California law mandates water meters be installed. What is your solution to make the fee equitable for those on meters and those without one?: California law created a situation that is simply unfair. The only way to be fair and remain within the law is to install the remaining meters in the shortest period of time. There just isn't a magic formula that will make the flat rates and the metered rates the same.

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?: They are really only two ways to fund it. One, borrow and raise rates or two, be successful in securing state grants or low interest loans.

Do you believe the district should spend money on lobbying efforts in Sacramento and/or Washington, D.C.? Why or why not?: The district no longer employs a state lobbyist, as membership in the Association of California Water Agencies provides that benefit. The district's lobbying firm in Washington, D.C., has since 2009, secured \$6.5 million in federal funding for STPUD at a cost of approximately \$304,000 for the same time period. These dollars are matched 50/50 with local funds, this lessens the burden on the district's

customers.

What do you know about STPUD getting money from the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act?: It is my understanding that LTRA contains language that reimburses one-third of the costs public water and wastewater agencies incur for relocating underground utilities in erosion control projects. In addition, the district, as lead agency in the Lake Tahoe Community Fire Protection Partnership, has received federal dollars for infrastructure improvement projects that relate to fire protection. Both of these were authorized under the act, and are therefore appropriate.

How do you balance the economic situation of the community with the infrastructure needs of the district?: It is very difficult to be sensitive to the high unemployment within our community and still replace aging infrastructure. But it is unfair to just ignore the problem and pass it on to our children and grandchildren.

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?: The district's requirements to export its wastewater is another example of an unfunded state mandate, but the district's investment in Alpine County may be able to pay benefits as the possibility of hydropower generation and increased uses of recycled water in California and Nevada. With proper foresight, the Alpine County operations could well become a revenue source for the district in the future.

What should be done with the land STPUD owns where the old post office was on Black Bart?: It is my understanding that due to the absence of sewer and water to the property, it has little value as a residential lot. Due to restrictions placed on that lot, the best and most economical solution would be to

demolish the existing structure and restore the property to its more natural state. I believe any coverage could be banked for future district needs.

There has been a three-year wage freeze for employees. What are your thoughts on employee raises and benefits?: We are all being asked to do more with less and our local economy has taken a hard hit. It would be pretty difficult to justify wage or benefit increases until the local economy shows some real signs of improvement. As a local business owner, I believe I will know when that happens.

When would you vote for a hike on water and sewer rates and why?: Again, there is a balancing act between sensitivity to the local economy and realizing the infrastructure continues to age regardless of the economy. It would be foolish to ignore the infrastructure, which makes it that much more important to seek additional funding sources, such as state and federal grants, that would allow projects to move forward and still keep rates reasonable.

Lukins Brothers Water District – any comments?: It's a good example of what happens without reinvestment into infrastructure. The board has stated in the absence of outside funding it would be unfair to burden the district's current customers with over \$20 million in necessary upgrades to bring the system up snuff.

What should be the main priority of South Tahoe PUD?: To continue to provide clean and safe drinking water and environmentally responsible wastewater collection, treatment, and export for the community in a financially responsible manner.

What should be the main priority of a South Tahoe PUD board member?: Listen to facts and make decisions on the basis of what benefits the greatest number of district customers.