

# STPUD ratepayer info may become public information

By Kathryn Reed

South Tahoe Public Utility District board members are expected to vote March 15 whether to release ratepayer contact information to the Citizens Alliance for Responsible Government.

John Runnels, a member of that group, made a presentation to the board Jan. 19. Because all five members were not in attendance the vote was pushed back to this Thursday when all are expected at the meeting.



Runnels said his group wants to be able to send direct mailings to ratepayers – in particular about Proposition 218 notifications.

State law requires the utility district to notify people by mail of potential increases in sewer or water rates. People must be told of the pending vote 50 days before the board is scheduled to take action.

Runnels told the board at the January meeting that the district's "PR is limiting." He contends people don't believe it's the truth; that the district puts a spin on the information.

"We say what rate increase we are proposing, what it means to various customer classes, what the current rate is and what it would be with the increase," Dennis Cocking, South Tahoe PUD spokesman, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting. "You have 45 days if you want to protest. You don't have to give a

reason.”

The district sends its Proposition 218 notifications to all 17,000 ratepayers even though some are only sewer customers.

“We have always met the letter of the law,” Cocking said.

Once the paperwork is sent the board cannot increase the rate beyond what people have been alerted to. However, they may reduce the increase like they did last year when the proposal was to up sewer rates 2.5 percent and the board chose to increase rates by 2 percent.

Notifications will go out this spring because of proposed changes to metered water customers. Right now people on meters have a bill that is based on a 55 percent fixed rate, 45 percent variable based on usage. It may go to a 65-35 split. The eventual goal of the district is for it to be 70 percent fixed, 30 percent variable.

Other rate increases are possible.

At the January meeting the board, with President Eric Schafer absent, was all over the place with the thought of releasing ratepayer information. Part of the problem was setting such precedent. Part was not knowing who else the Alliance might give the addresses to and the potential ratepayers would be inundated with junk mail. Some liked the idea of being transparent.

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**Meeting info:**

March 15 at 2pm, 1275 Meadow Crest Drive, South Lake Tahoe.