

South Tahoe mayor likely won't finish term on council

By Kathryn Reed

Claire Fortier will reportedly not be finishing her term on the South Lake Tahoe City Council. Her partner, Maria Pielacet, has been offered a job in Washington to run the medical clinic for Microsoft.

Fortier did not want to talk much with *Lake Tahoe News* about what this means.

"I'm not comfortable addressing the issue until Maria has a contract signed," Fortier said.



Claire Fortier

While Fortier would not say what her plans are, the buzz at city hall is she wants to stay until her term as mayor is up. She has told people she will be resigning in the middle of her four-year term.

Fortier was elected to the council in November 2010. Her term expires in December 2014. Her term as mayor is over in the fall. The council votes among themselves as to who will be mayor and mayor pro tem, with each being a one-year stint, though people can be voted in consecutive or multiple years.

Mayor Pro Tem Tom Davis said Fortier had not spoken to him about her plans.

As the city ordinance is now, a council member's position is not considered vacated until they actually leave. So, if Fortier were to stay until her term as mayor is up, the council in December would either appoint someone to fill the two remaining years or a special election would be called. The first scenario means the public has no say in 20 percent of the representation on the council, the latter scenario means the taxpayers pay for Fortier's desire to hang onto the title of mayor.

Because the city ordinance mirrors state law the process for appointment or election cannot be changed at the local level.

The process is that the remaining council members must decide within 60 days of a council position being vacated whether to appoint someone or to call for an election. There are three specified dates in 2013 when an election could occur – March 5, June 4, Nov. 5. The election cannot occur less than 114 days from the date it is called. So, if Fortier stays until December, the soonest there could be an election to fill that vacated seat is June 4, 2013.

On the Nov. 6 ballot will be the council positions now held by Hal Cole and Bruce Grego. Cole has not decided if he will be running for another term, while Grego is ready to hit the campaign trail.

Besides the council position, Fortier is the city's rep on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board. That agency is in the midst of approving a Regional Plan update, which is expected to be voted on in December. How having a lame duck member would affect that process is not known.

"There is no impact to the current makeup of the TRPA Governing Board until the city makes a change," Julie Regan, spokeswoman with TRPA, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Mayor Fortier is very engaged in the Regional Plan update and other matters, and we would not expect any departure from that."

The city is also in the throes of dealing with the need to hire a city manager, so Fortier may be in town making important decisions about issues and people she will not have to be held accountable to or for.