

Grand jury wants El Dorado County to take over S. Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Having South Lake Tahoe be absorbed by El Dorado County, and turning the ice rink into a private enterprise are the two issues the El Dorado County Grand Jury wrote reports on involving the city.



While South Tahoe Public Utility District was a target of an investigation, grand jury foreman Ted Long said no report was made.

The entire grand jury report is expected to be available within a matter of days.

Lake Tahoe News has received advance copies of some of the reports.

Long said he is the one who initiated the query into consolidating the city into the county.

“What is the city doing that is so earth shattering?” Long said to *Lake Tahoe News*. “I think it would be better to get rid of the city.”

The report says, “This grand jury is suggesting that a dialog should begin to reinvent the meaning of local government. What are our priorities and how can they best be paid for? Have we outgrown the traditional notions? Are we using technology to its maximum benefit?”

If South Lake Tahoe wanted the county to take over, first it would have to dissolve, as in no longer being an incorporated

city. This requires LAFCo (Local Agency Formation Commission) to be involved.

Long should know all of this because when he was on the South Lake Tahoe City Council he was the city's rep to LAFCo.

With the voters in the mid-1960s agreeing to incorporate, it takes the voters of South Lake Tahoe to unincorporate. Only two cities in California have done so. That was in the 1970s – one did so because it was broke, the other because of rampant corruption.

The grand jury report says money would be saved by consolidating city and county resources and getting rid of the city. Long said this would happen by not having duplicate top administrators.

But consolidation isn't that easy because of labor agreements, debt the city has and assets it owns.

City Manager Nancy Kerry said if dissolution was so easy cities like Stockton would be looking at doing so instead of filing for bankruptcy. Plus, the difficulty in actually dissolving redevelopment agencies in California proves the process is convoluted.

"I think we should look at the broader picture. Should we leverage resources? Sure. We are talking to the school district and everyone," Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This week the city met again with Lake Valley fire officials to discuss creating a partnership. While no decisions have been made, the city is looking at ways to save money and get rid of duplicate resources.

While the civil grand jury wants the city to save money, having a private company operate the taxpayer built ice rink is not a good thing, according to the second report. This, despite the fact the city is saving in excess of \$100,000 by

not operating the rink. That figure does not include the profit margin the operators are to pay the city.

The grand jury issued five recommendations regarding the ice rink. The main one is to go back to the voters to see if they are OK with the rink being operated by a private company. The other recommendations are things like mandating the council respond to grand jury emails. But protocol would be to have the city attorney respond to legal matters.

“Private-public partnerships have been legal for a long time,” Kerry said in regards to the flap involving the piece of ice.

She said when the city receives a copy of the report City Attorney Patrick Enright will review any legal issues that are brought up and the findings will be in the city’s response to the grand jury.

When the grand jury report is officially out, it will be accessible online. This June 25 *LTN* article is about the Pioneer Fire Protection District hiring a political consultant with taxpayer dollars and the ties El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steven Bailey has to the consultant.