

Opinion: 'It's time for reason to replace rage'

By Claire Fortier

Progressive or provincial? That is the crux of the issue facing our South shore community during this election and well into the next decade.

Do we want a viable, prosperous community that our children and grandchildren are proud to call home? Or do we want the Tahoe of yesterday – only older and shabbier, with fewer families and more boarded up businesses?



Claire Fortier

The question is not new. Yet every time we take baby steps forward in this town, howls of outrage drown out the most reasoned and moderate of voices. Those howls aren't coming from people who envision a better Tahoe. The howls are indicative of how we have allowed NIMBYism to usurp community benefit.

Democracy is a messy business, but it is not a mud wrestling contest nor a death match. Yet, we as a community, have become accustomed to rage over reason.

The one area where we all agree, or at least seem to agree, is on preserving this slice of heaven we call the Jewel of the Sierra. Ensuring the pristine beauty and purity of Lake Tahoe

for generations to come is a value deeply ingrained in the hearts of those fortunate enough to live here.

The problem is the setting for the famed Jewel: The increasingly second-rate 1960s town called South Lake Tahoe.

For almost a decade, we have soul-searched, conducted endless community meetings and spent millions in planning money to answer the critical question of envisioning our future.

We have the answer. It's called the city's General Plan. That plan was hailed at the state level for its elements of sustainability and environmental innovation.

The General Plan, as well as the TRPA's new effort to allow local jurisdictions more control over their destiny, should give South Lake Tahoe hope. It may soon be possible to take what we have and rebuild it better. That should be exciting news.

But you certainly wouldn't think so if you listen to the outrage over the loop road or the ceaseless thrashing over the hole or even the fatalism that the TRPA should be eliminated all together. (Hint to those willing to trash the TRPA: It won't do the city a bit of good because we are still in California and subject to even more stringent regulations without the bi-state agency.)

On a more local level, the city's recent push to clean up and fix up our town to make it more attractive to tourists, which is our economic life blood, should engender enthusiasm. Instead we find ourselves mired down in the vitriol of the very vocal few. That vocal minority realize they can thwart most any project or process just by raising their voices louder and more harshly than anyone else in town.

This small-ball way of doing business will ensure that nothing changes, only continues to deteriorate. But the reality is the Tahoe of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s that the vocal few seem

so passionate about preserving is never coming back, even if nothing changes. With no change, our town will simply deteriorate further.

We will continue to decline unless we elevate the community's expectations and reinvigorate the community conversation.

As we sit on the verge of renewal or degeneration, it is time for those in this community who have a view beyond their special interests to get into the conversation. It's time to push city council candidates to answer real questions on what they want for their community in the future. Are they content with what is or do they see what could be?

It's time for reason to replace rage. It's time to re-establish our core commitment to South Lake Tahoe's future and not squander our limited window of opportunity for a small-minded few.

Finding consensus takes time, energy and emotional investment. Is our community, through our community leaders, really ready to find consensus or stay mired in yesteryear?

Claire Fortier is mayor of South Lake Tahoe.