

S. Tahoe council candidates try to differentiate themselves

By Kathryn Reed

The five candidates for the two South Lake Tahoe City Council seats agree a broader approach to best management practices, instead of parcel-by-parcel, is a good idea and local jurisdictions having more say are potential positives of a yet-to-be-approved update of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Regional Plan.



While they liked the idea of changes that may come to the basin if the Regional Plan is updated, none believed this would be a cure-all, assuming it cures anything.

The five – incumbents Hal Cole and Bruce Grego, and newcomers Austin Sass, JoAnn Conner and Clinton Schue – answered a series of questions Oct. 1 in the first forum of the season.

(*Lake Tahoe News*, South Tahoe Association of Realtors and South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association put on this event at Inn by the Lake.)

Each started the event with an intro before the questions were asked and then were given a chance to make a closing statement.

Sass talked about the need for real leadership on the council and the understanding of multi-million dollar budgets. He added that without a vision, no one would invest in the community.

Cole spoke of his fiscal experience, that the city is in recovery mode and that recreation is key.

Grego touted his backing of Nevada Senate Bill 271 that called for corrective measures to TRPA, that land use control is the No. 1 issue, and how he has always opposed marijuana dispensaries.

Conner spoke of the need to start doing things instead of studying them, the need to promote recreation, and the need to tap the knowledge and insight of local businesspeople.

Schue doesn't understand why Tahoe recreation has not been better marketed and he wants to bring jobs to town.

When it came to discussing the proposed loop road that would re-route Highway 50 traffic in the state line area, consensus was almost found among the five.

Schue would like to investigate pedestrian overpasses and is against the taking of private property.

Grego opposes what the Tahoe Transportation District has brought forward and wonders why a loop road is needed.

While Cole supported a loop road when the Heavenly Village project was going in, he does not want the TTD alternative.

Sass can't figure out why so much time has gone into a project that has no money, let alone no real plan.

Conner likes the loop road that exists and believes until a return on investment can be proved to change what is in place, then it would be harmful to businesses and residents to go forward.

Blame went to previous councilmembers for the hole in the ground at the state line. The one-time convention center-hotel complex is now just bankrupt concrete and rebar that spans 19 parcels because the council never insisted on a consolidated

parcel map. (Owens Financial, the largest property owner, has a proposal to build commercial along the highway and leave the rest.) All of that land is private – not city owned.

Sass said without the city having a vision for where it is going it is hard to decide what is best for that plot of land.

Cole believes the land will have more value if the state line area is revitalized and a loop road goes in.

Grego said the hole occurred because previous councils caved to special interest groups. He is not sure what was planned for the site would be appropriate today.

Conner questions the integrity of the rebar and concrete that have endured the elements for several years. She calls it a “dangerous eyesore” that needs to change – even if that is little shops.

Schue says the last thing the town needs is more retail. But he does believe a convention center is a good idea.

When it comes to appeasing those who live in the unincorporated area of El Dorado County in the Lake Tahoe Basin, it was pointed out how it is not legally possible for those residents to vote in city elections and that if the land were to be annexed, the county residents would have to initiate it.