

Swanson cleared of bribery allegation

By Kathryn Reed

The bribery investigation involving South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman Angela Swanson is over. No charges will be filed.

“At this time we don’t believe Mrs. Swanson intended on a criminal act,” Dave Stevenson, investigator with the El Dorado County District Attorney’s Office, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Swanson has been under suspicion since August 2012 when Gino DiMatteo, then owner of City of Angels II medical marijuana dispensary, was arrested on a slew of drug charges. He implicated Swanson in a bribery case, claiming she would vote a certain way if he supplied cash to a charity she was involved with.



Angela Swanson

Stevenson said the investigation began based on a tip from a source, who wants to be anonymous, saying that there was some criminal wrongdoing going on.

“Throughout our investigation we look at different people and their involvement and their intent and if any laws were violated. Obviously, shortly into the investigation it was determined that Mr. DiMatteo had criminal wrongdoing and

intent so we veered toward him," Stevenson said. "That took a lot of time. Once it was completed, we focused on if anyone else was involved in criminal intent."

DiMatteo pleaded guilty Jan. 9, 2013, to possession with the intent to distribute marijuana. He was sentenced to five years in prison. During the investigation it was uncovered that DiMatteo should never have been allowed to open a pot shop because he was a felon. But South Lake Tahoe officials never did a criminal background check on him.

"Ultimately, our investigation has concluded and found that while it is clear that Mr. DiMatteo believed he was attempting to bribe Councilmember Swanson, it is equally clear that the councilmember already intended to vote favorably for Mr. DiMatteo and his marijuana dispensary," District Attorney Vern Pierson said in letter to South Lake Tahoe councilmembers.

Swanson's vote for medical marijuana has been consistent since she has been on the council.

The bribery issue stems from Swanson and Nancy Rollston, the head of the Lake Tahoe Educational Foundation, accepting more than \$1,000 in cash for the foundation from DiMatteo that was delivered in an unmarked brown bag. This was just prior to vote of the council involving DiMatteo. (Despite its being drug money, the foundation has never returned it. Swanson is on the nonprofit's board.)

Swanson always maintained her innocence and has said there was nothing wrong with accepting that money. She did not respond to multiple inquiries.

A bit of potential irony is Swanson is running for El Dorado County supervisor and would be in a position to have some say over the District Attorney's Office, at least budget-wise. And Pierson is up for re-election this year.