

Jones: 'I am the most qualified person for the position'

Publisher's note: Lake Tahoe News asked the two candidates running for District 2 of the South Tahoe Public Utility District board the same questions. The answers are running in the order received by LTN.



Name: Jim Jones

Profession/work experience: B.S. civil engineer, Cal Poly, 1968

M.S. civil engineering, Stanford University, 1972

Consulting engineer, South Lake Tahoe, 1977 to present

Executive director, Lake Tahoe Research Coordination Board, National Science Foundation, 1974 to 1977, South Lake Tahoe

Sanitary engineer, Environmental Protection Agency, San Francisco, 1972 to 1974

Hydrologist and civil engineer, U. S. Bureau of Reclamation, Sacramento and Denver, 1968 to 1972

Registered civil engineer in California, Nevada and Hawaii

California Community College instructor credential

Age: 71

What organizations, committees or groups are you or have you

been involved with?: Member of the American Society of Civil Engineers

Kiwanis Sunrisers of South Lake Tahoe, member and president, 25 years

Tahoe Tallac Association, founding board member, 22 years

South Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce, member 28 years.

Why are you running for the South Tahoe PUD board?: The prosperity of our community is directly related to the services provided by the district. With my education, training and experience, I feel that this is where I can best serve the community where I have lived and owned a residence for 40 years. I am deeply concerned about protecting the \$1.6 billion investment that we have in infrastructure and improving our fire protection facilities. I have the time, enthusiasm and the energy to carry out the duties of a director.

Why should people vote for you over the other candidate?: With my knowledge and understanding of the "Water World", I am the most qualified person for the position. I have represented the district on the regional, state and federal level. I have been heavily involved in lobbying and obtaining over \$90 million of federal funding to rebuild the wastewater treatment plant in the '80s, replace the export pipe line in the '90s and most recently to obtain matching funds for fire protection in the basin. I was the chairman of the MTBE Committee for the Association of California Water Association and testified before Congress in the successful effort to have MTBE banned. We also won \$69 million from the oil companies for cleaning up their pollution of our groundwater and wells.

What do you think is the most pressing issue facing the district and how will you deal with it?: As for the water distribution system, we have about 250 miles (1.3 million lineal feet) of waterlines. Most of these lines are more than 50 years old and at least 10 percent are under sized or failing. We desperately need to upsize many of these lines, most of which are in the older parts of town such Al Tahoe and

Sierra Tract, for fire protection. The cost of replacing the old water lines about \$1 million per mile and we should be replacing at least 1 percent or 2.5 miles per years. Many of sewer and water pump stations are more than 50 years old and need upgrades and significant repairs.

Would you consider merging administrative services with the city of South Lake Tahoe so there would be a reduction in cost to ratepayers? Why or why not?: The jurisdictional boundaries are not the same and the county would not be included. If in the unlikely event that city and the county were to be combined, there might be some benefits. At this point in time, because of the unique mandates of the district, I don't see any significant benefits in combining STPUD with the city. I don't think anyone would suggest merging the school district into the city for a similar reason.

The district is seen by some as a cog in the wheel for economic development. Recent examples are charging \$50,000 to add a small bathroom to a business and \$500,000 for a Laundromat to move. What are your opinions about the district's fees?: The district is a publicly owned entity by the 17,000 property owners within the district boundaries. The value of the district infrastructure is about \$1.6 billion meaning that everyone has about a \$100,000 investment in water and sewer facilities. Connections fees for new or expanded projects partially pay for a "buy in" to the existing system. Thus the existing owners are not forced to subsidize new development.

The sewer units go with the property and cannot be moved. When a Laundromat was recently forced to relocate, they were given an estimate of about \$250,000 (not \$500,000) to buy approximately 50 more sewer units to install the Laundromat in an existing building. They then decided to move into the Raley's building at the Y where there were already enough sewer units at no cost.

As for the reported \$50,000 fee for adding a bathroom, the staff at the district has no idea where that came from as the cost for adding a sewer unit is about \$5,000 in an existing residence or commercial building.

Being on the board requires working with four others. Give readers an example of how you work well others in difficult situations with differing opinions: The board works under a long and complicated list of regulation and laws implemented by the state and federal governments. These regulations include not only water quality and environmental issues, but how the district deals with labor issues. Education and experience are necessary in dealing with many issues. When every board member understands the issues and implications, it is easier to come to a resolution. Board members are encouraged to attend meetings, workshops or conferences of the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), the California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA) or the California Special Districts Association (CSDA) to learn the "water business" and how to be the best director as they can be.

What needs fixing at the district and how would you go about fixing it?: The funding mechanism is out of whack! For the last eight years, the majority of the board has not seen ready to raise the rates to cover the cost-of-living increases or to adequately fund capital improvement projects. Because of the lack of funding, staff has constantly had to modify the 10-year master plan, ignore the 20-year plan and scramble to delay repairs, upgrades or replacement of infrastructure.

For years, I have not supported the budget prepared to reflect the lack of increased fees. I have advocated gradual, modest increases to cover the long-term master plan. We are now on a course that will at some time lead to high annual rate increase over multiple years.

We should be building for the future, not stealing from it!

How many board meetings in the last year have you attended?:

In the past year, I have attended 22 of the 24 board meetings, missing two meeting when I represented the district at Association of California Water Agencies conferences. Additionally, I have attended monthly Operation Committee and other ad hoc committee meeting. I also represent the district at monthly meetings of the El Dorado County Water Agency of which I am the current chairman.

Do you know what a special district is and how familiar are you with the governance of a special district?:

Special districts are created to provide a specific public service for a community under California law. These district boards are often the ones most closely chosen and regulated by the local community when compared to larger state and federal departments. They reflect the flexibility that local communities want that larger state agencies cannot provide.

With a constrained budget, how would you prioritize projects involving the delivery of potable water, the collection and treatment of wastewater, and the export and reuse of treated wastewater?:

I have long advocated a long-term master plan of at least 10 and possibly 20 years. Some districts actually plan and save for 50- to 100-year capital improvement master plans. Our staff will establish priorities based upon potential failure factor which is multiplied by the impact of failure. Other factors such as regulatory deadlines and availability of grants are used in the evaluated. Priorities are evaluated annually and may be changed as conditions change.

Because of fiscal restraints, many higher priorities projects have been pushed back or kicked down the road. I have argued against the lack of fiduciary responsibility in protecting the districts assets for our customers.

In order to reduce water and sewer rates would you be a proponent of a reduced level of service by the district? Why

or why not?: The district has a list of minimum levels of services which the board will periodically reviewed and revised. At this point, I don't believe there are any significant changes that we can implement without adversely impacting the environment or the lake. Additionally, we do not want to reduce the services that might impact the tourist industry that the city thrives on.

An example of issues that threatened to impact the tourist industry was the MTBE pollution problem. The district immediately implemented a policy of not providing water with any detection of MTBE even when the state set a higher standard that would allow a possibility of some smelling the pollutant. People were calling the district and the chamber of commerce to see if they should bring their own bottled water.

The district has been criticized for providing a higher compensation package than other entities in Lake Tahoe. Do you believe this package is justified? Why or why not? If not, what is fair and what will you do to change things?: The staff is full of highly trained individual with special skills, training and one or more state certifications. We need to and are required by state legislation to compensate them on a level comparable with the rest of the water/sewer districts in the state. There are legislative mandates that the district adhere to in negotiating with labor union for public agencies. Salaries need to be comparable with similar jobs in similar agencies for recruiting and retaining high quality employees.

It should be noted that the district has never provided post-retirement benefits that have threatened the financial health of many other agencies in California and the nation.

As a board member how would you represent all district customers and not just the small percentage of people who comment or complain to you?: As a civil engineer with 45 years of involvement in water issues, I have always been concerned with doing the right things to make the systems work

efficiently and protect the district's \$1.6 billion investment for all of our customer/owners. I look at the whole picture and not to anecdotal stories and the small minority of the usual suspects that don't represent the 17,000 that we serve.

Tell the voters something about yourself that they may not know: Back in the early 1980s, I was involved in Baja off-road racing and got mixed up with a group in Southern California that were tied into Toyota. They had access to a supply of Toyota mini-truck that they converted to 4X4s before Toyota had factory built 4X4 mini-truck. I was marketing these super trick trucks to Toyota dealers as far north as Portland and east to Denver. I was selling 4X4 trucks to Shehadi Toyota.