

# Novasel: 'This is not a job for first-timers'

*Publisher's note: Lake Tahoe News asked the two El Dorado County District 5 supervisor candidates a series of questions. All are the same except for one that is specific to each candidate. The responses are being run in the order LTN received them.*



**Name:** Sue Novasel

**Profession/work experience:** Business owner/school board member

**Age:** 58

**What organizations, committees or groups are you or have you been involved with?:** Presently, I am serving a third term in office (12 years) as a school board member (and past president) of Lake Tahoe Unified School District's board of education; president of the board of Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care; secretary of the board of Lake Tahoe Wedding & Honeymoon Association; board member of the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce; and member of Barton Hospital's Community Advisory Committee. I have served on the original Meyers Community Plan team from 1990 to 1993; chair for over 10 years of the Meyers Community Roundtable Committee; immediate past president of Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe; member of the 56 Acre/Lakeview Commons Advisory Committee; and

a member of TRPA's Pathway 2007 Committee.

**Why are you running for supervisor?:** I have served our community for over 30 years as a member of over 20 boards. I am deeply rooted in our community. My varied background has given me the breadth and depth of experience necessary to understand the dynamics and complexities of the Tahoe basin and this district. I know how to make a fair and balanced decision while being respectful to others. I seek to be your county supervisor because I want to increase the service I can give to our community, and pledge to be your full time supervisor.

**Why should people vote for you over the other candidate?:** This is not a job for first-timers. I have a demonstrated ability to work in a governing body with professional administrative staff. My 12 years of experience as a public servant has also given me a broad-ranging set of connections with community residents as well as the skills required to deal with the demands and requirements of the job of county supervisor. Experience has taught me that good decisions result from reaching out to get information from all those affected and that listening carefully is generally more important than talking. I will work full time to achieve the greatest good for those I represent, which is critical for our community.

**What do you think is the most pressing issue facing El Dorado County and how will you deal with it?:** Economic vitality is the most important issue throughout our district. TRPA's new Regional Plan update includes incentives and processes that can spur businesses to redevelop run-down properties or add new businesses to our communities while improving our environment.

In addition, a huge issue in all of District V is the fire risk resulting from poor forest health and dry conditions. We must be sure we are organized for rapid response by CalFire, the U.S. Forest Service, and local fire agencies so that

effective coordinated action by all can occur the instant a fire starts.

Another important duty of the District V supervisor is to assure fair representation. Joint meetings between the county and City Council, school and utility districts, Tahoe Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service, and Lake Valley Fire District should be sought where major issues, challenges and opportunities for joint action can be discussed and planned.

**The 56-acre project, which includes Lakeview Commons and the campground on the other side of Highway 50, is owned by the county and maintained by the city. The county has not invested a dime and does not contribute to the maintenance and operations. Would you ask the county to help with paying some of the bills or would you advocate for deeding the land to the city? Why or why not?:** The county has invested money within the 56-acre project area. El Dorado County built the South Lake Tahoe library and fully funds its operations, including snow removal. County staff maintains the building and grounds. As a member of the 56-acre Advisory Committee, our group studied the possibility of transferring property to the city. The property is currently under a 50-year lease between the city and the county. With the joint City-County Recreation Master Plan and the 56-acre Master Plan having most of its elements still to be done, there may be some capital improvement opportunities that the existing city/county arrangement may offer – which might go away if the city wholly owns the property. In the mid-90s, a transfer nearly occurred but the effort was terminated due to West Slope concerns about the city's commitment to retain the campground and the library. Those issues would all need to be addressed prior to pursuing a transfer. That being said, Lakeview Commons is a study on how our community can plan and create a masterpiece of recreation and community events for all residents (city and county) and tourists alike.

**The city and county are putting together a recreation master**

**plan, but the Board of Supervisors has never voted on whether it would fund the implementation of the plan. Would you dedicate funds to promote the investment of recreation?:** Absolutely. Lake Tahoe is a world-class destination resort town. As our area has struggled to re-invent ourselves in the area of recreation and tourism, it is vital that we understand how our locals and tourists alike need better recreational opportunities for improving our quality of life. Specific projects need to be identified so that priorities can be planned and implemented. The county will be considering funding when it [had] budget hearings in September. There is a joint City Council/Board of Supervisors meeting scheduled in South Lake Tahoe on Oct. 28, at which time it is expected that the Recreation Master Plan will be adopted.

**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 key is to listen to what other are saying, seeking and noting areas of agreement and disagreement. I always consider possible compromises that might achieve agreement (or at least, seek first steps toward resolution and action). To be an effective, successful leader you must listen to all sides then initiate action by incorporating items that everyone can agree upon and which ends with a positive solution.

**What is working in the county and what isn't; and how would you go about changing what isn't working?:** County employees are doing their jobs, serving the public in an excellent manner. What is not working is the board and some department heads who are not working together and with the CAO. The board is not giving consistent policy direction or setting a level of civility in public meetings that the public expects and deserves. There will be three new personalities on the board in this coming year. The board needs to work better together to become a strong advocate for public policy and leadership for our county. I will insist upon civility, respect and

action plans to create a clearer direction for our county government.

**Would you consider replacing the current CAO? Why or why not?:**

It is the duty of the board to give clear direction to the CAO. With three new Board members, providing a stable atmosphere and consistent direction needs to be the first course of action. We need to work with the current CAO at that level in order to understand and assess the CAO's job performance.

**The grand jury labeled the county dysfunctional. What is your**

**opinion of that assessment?:** I agree with the grand jury's assessment that dysfunction within the board needs to be addressed. As to the recommendation to change several elected department head positions to appointed, the public reaction to that proposal has been extremely negative and I disagree with the grand jury on this point. There are benefits to the elected department heads having the independence to serve the voters, as opposed to being controlled by the board and/or administration. Most elected department heads are not seriously challenged (if challenged at all) when they run for re-election, giving them little need to posture for political reasons. I believe it is important to communicate well with department heads and I will work hard to build positive working relationships with both those who are appointed and elected.

**Agriculture is a huge economic driver for the county. What are your ideas in regards to the drought to ensure farmers and ranchers have enough water?:**

With regard to the agriculture, issues of urbanization, conservation, management and utilization of lands within the county are fundamental elements that need to be considered as pressures from increases in population within our county threaten the rural character of our lands as well as the water supply in our county. It is especially important during these drought years and vital that agricultural water supplies be kept from being

diverted to urban uses. The county needs to be proactive in the development of long-term water sources for irrigation and we need to be constantly searching for ways to expand sources. We need to prioritize water needs and actively pursue long-term solutions for the agriculture industry. I will take steps to assure that plans for future water use are properly drawn, reviewed and executed throughout the county. We need to get information about opportunities and costs, then evaluate feasibility and determine how extended supply facilities can be financed.

**The Sand Fire this summer proved El Dorado County was lacking in emergency response coordination efforts. What improvements would you propose?:** The Sand Fire, similar to the Angora Fire in Tahoe, was a “perfect storm”, as characterized by first responders. A huge issue in all of District V is the fire risk resulting from poor forest health and dry conditions. We must be sure we are organized for rapid response by CalFire, the U.S. Forest Service, and local fire agencies so that effective coordinated action by all can occur the instant a fire starts. I will work to ensure that reserve funding is strengthened to provide critical response time to emergency events while still providing general funding sources that are equipped to handle essential services and public safety to our communities.

**How would you improve relations with the city of South Lake Tahoe?:** To improve staff relationships, I would have the principal counterpart positions – county chief administrative officer and city manager, county counsel and city attorney – meet after facilitating and developing a discussion agenda, then have them meet on a regular basis thereafter. To improve the elected officials relationship, I would meet periodically with the mayor and, with the mayor’s knowledge and approval, meet with other members of the City Council. These meetings would be in addition to being sure that my office did a very good job of setting up the annual county board/city of South Lake Tahoe meeting, such as the one being held in October. To

improve communications, this would include setting joint meetings between City Council and county supervisors, taking tours of city and county projects with emphasis on major project areas, and meeting with representatives of other Tahoe basin agencies such as the TRPA, Tahoe Conservancy, Tahoe chambers, U.S. Forest Service and Lake Valley Fire District.

**You are involved in many things, how can people trust you will devote the necessary time it takes to be supervisor?:** I recognize that the job of supervisor is at least 70 hours per week, with over 500 meetings per year. This obligation would be of utmost importance to me and would necessitate the need to resign from other positions I hold within our community. I pledge to devote my complete attention and energies to being a full time supervisor for District V.

**Tell the voters something about yourself that they may not know:** Many people didn't know (until I mentioned it during the primaries) that I was an Olympic torch runner when the torch came through Tahoe in 1984 (on its way to the Summer Games in Los Angeles). I was the student representative for Lake Tahoe Community College's board of trustees at the time and they asked me to represent the college by running the torch for the school. It was such a great honor that I decided to donate the torch back to the college and it still resides in their gym today.