

Palacio: 'It's time for a new generation'

Publisher's note: *Lake Tahoe News asked the seven South Lake Tahoe City Council 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: Matt Palacio

Profession/work experience: *Did not respond.*

Age: 34 (35 later this month)

What organizations, committees or groups are you or have you been involved with?: I'm a member of the Tahoe Regional Young Professionals, South Lake Tahoe Economic Development Task Force, and the 2014 Leadership Lake Tahoe class.

Why are you running for City Council?: It's time for a new generation to be represented in City Council. I'm running to be a voice for everyone in South Lake Tahoe, including the young homeowners, business owners and professionals who see a future in South Lake Tahoe.

Why should people vote for you over the other candidates?: South Lake Tahoe needs new ideas and a new perspective in its leadership. Folks can vote for three City Council candidates in the upcoming election and a vote for me is a vote for a new voice and diversified representation within the council.

What do you think is the most pressing issue in South Lake Tahoe and how will you deal with it?: Lack of vision plagues this town. It's as if we can't get out of our own way and any opportunity we have to improve our town is botched due to infighting. I'd like to help build consensus by balancing facts with feedback and having City Council be more present in creating public-private partnerships and work together. This town is at a crossroads; we can have "more of the same" or we can put our differences aside and move forward with improvements that make South Lake Tahoe a better place to live, work and play.

If the city cannot reach an agreement with its bargaining units, are you willing to go to impasse? Why or why not?: This is an issue for the city manager to handle, and it's something I look forward to being debriefed on. The City Council will vote on bargaining units, but they aren't necessarily at the bargaining table.

How would you resolve the CalPERS and health care issues in the city?: *Did not respond.*

What is your opinion about term limits for the council?: I stand behind term limits as a way to help the council from getting stale. It allows new council members to bring in fresh ideas to move the city forward.

If the city has positive cash flow, where should the money be spent?: Positive cash flow should be reinvested in the community by way of infrastructure that supports our environment like gutters and streets, and enhances public safety like sidewalks and bike paths. But we should also consider shovel-ready projects that provide immediate improvements in our built environment, access to recreation and create jobs.

What are your ideas for increasing the city's revenues?: I have a sales and marketing background, so I can tell you that

to increase revenue, you have to increase business. How do you increase business? By developing your product and reaching new markets. By improving South Lake Tahoe's built environment and offering new amenities we'll attract better spending visitors and stand out against the competition. Let's not just go for "more" business – let's go for "smarter" business to drive revenue from our tourism industry.

What is your vision for the 56-acre project?: The 56-acre project is an opportunity for South Lake Tahoe to positively position itself as a recreation destination. Improving the recreation center's facility and programs will help residents and visitors alike. Highway 50 is the main corridor through South Lake Tahoe, but only a short stretch runs along the lake. We need to capitalize on this portion and make this into a community hub for both residents and visitors.

What would you do to improve relations with El Dorado County?: Are you referencing the El Dorado County government or the unincorporated area of Meyers within El Dorado County? I think the answer is the same for both: we need to have two-way communication with the government and citizens. Citizens of Meyers cannot vote in the city, but they are a part of our South Lake community, with the same schools, roads, and businesses. I look forward to working with El Dorado County as well; I've had brief conversations with both Kenny Curtzwiler and Sue Novasel regarding our mutual campaigns and what it would mean to work together. By listening to their needs and having them listen to the city's needs a mutual understanding should be reached. We may not always agree, but at least we'll understand where each other is coming from.

Is the city on the right course with restructuring debt and focusing on recreation? Why or why not?: The city is on track for focusing on recreation, with the Planning Commission and recreation plan building momentum. The city is maintaining transparency and giving residents the opportunity to give their feedback by conducting email surveys and public

workshops. There seems to be a high level of collaboration, too, with recent projects like the Tahoe Valley Area Plan integrating bike paths and parks to continue in the direction of recreation. I think the OpenGov.com website that the city is now a part of is a huge step forward in transparency. If you want to see the money that comes into and out of the city coffers, this is the best place to start.

Name one vote the City Council made in the last four years you are proud of and one you are disappointed in – and why?: Proud of: I commend the City Council for voting for the Harrison Avenue Project, and working to implement this public-private partnership that helps our town visually, economically and environmentally.

Disappointed in: I was disappointed to see our elected officials vote to delay the plastic bag ban's second phase despite overwhelming support for the initiative from shoppers and businesses alike.

What is working in the city and what isn't; and how would you go about changing what isn't working?: I think we have a movement in the younger generation with people who are ready for change. Some of us moved here for the recreation lifestyle and have become involved as change agents (myself), and others have come home after starting successful careers elsewhere to help their hometown flourish (Scott Fair, Darcie Collins). I'm the face of this movement; we're ready to lead South Lake Tahoe in the present and future.

I think what is lacking is community engagement. I think our citizens don't feel connected to their local government for a number of reasons, it could be the transiency that is natural in a resort community, but I also think a lack of representation on the council plays into this as well. It's hard to feel a connection to council members who say they want improved recreation and a cleaner environment when as council members they are not recreating nor voting to improve our

environment. I hope to be a council member that is approachable for people of all ages, I am someone deeply committed to our environmental sustainability as this is our biggest asset, and as someone who moved here for a management position at a ski resort and the recreation opportunities in our community I feel I have a better understanding of where we need to invest in first to make life better for residents and visitors alike. I want to connect with the community by making myself available at community events like Live at Lakeview, the Stand Up Paddleboard Series, or chats at local coffee shops in the winter. I may not always agree with every opinion I hear, but making yourself available is key to an inclusive government.

Being on the council requires working with four others. Give readers an example of how you work well others in difficult situations with differing opinions: Leadership Lake Tahoe's class of 2014 was tasked with putting on a summit as our class project. There were no real parameters given, no budget to start with, only a hierarchal framework. I was elected to be the co-chair of our summit and we set our sights on pulling off a large-scale summit. There were lots of differing opinions on what type of event to put on, how to raise funds, and who to invite as speakers for our panels and keynotes. These decisions were all made through consensus building and getting the class to buy-in to the vision so they felt they were a part of the overall decision making process.

I define leadership as someone who knows the way, shows the way, and goes the way. John Rice at Sierra-at-Tahoe is the best leader I've ever worked for and I use him as my leadership model. We believe in his leadership skills, he invites us to share his vision for the future, and then John actively leads us to our destination.

What is your opinion about the following topics:

- **Ferry service on Lake Tahoe?:** Ferry service on Lake Tahoe

would decrease pollution by reducing emissions, and would allow us to increase visitation to the South Shore. A ferry system would create new, high paying jobs as well. So long as the boats had a moderate impact on the environment, I support a ferry service on Lake Tahoe.

- **Loop road?:** The Loop Road is a sensitive subject for many people in our city due to the issues arising from other development projects such as the Chateau project. The city has lost trust with some citizens in our community because of how past projects were handled. Yet I believe that we need to create a walkable downtown area for our residents and visitors. The majority of the city's budget comes from TOT and visitors' sales tax revenue. Our tourism economy needs to adapt to what visitors want and we also need to embrace a future that doesn't rely on the automobile for your shopping experience. We are a ways off with green-lighting a project like the Loop Road due to many issues outside of the city's control (Caltrans, an environmental impact report, etc.) but I hope to be on the council to bring in all sides the Loop Road conversation and hopefully we'll move forward in a sensible fashion.

- **Future of Lake Tahoe Airport?:** The Lake Tahoe Airport is South Lake Tahoe's largest polluter, next to the Tahoe Keys. If it's going to exist, it should be to serve the greater good of the community. I'd like to see the airport redeveloped to bring in revenue to fund infrastructure and public safety.

- **Increasing the transient occupancy tax?:** I'm staunchly against increasing South Lake Tahoe's transient occupancy tax. Our TOT rates are higher than San Diego, Monterey and Palm Springs – all of which are thriving destinations with higher occupancy rates and a more vibrant tourism economy. A failing hotel doesn't raise rates to bring in more revenue; they work on improving the property to generate the traffic necessary for a successful business. Instead of increasing TOT, let's grow our cash flow by improving South Lake Tahoe's recreation

offerings and bringing in better spending visitors.

• **Changing the vacation rental ordinance to reduce the number of such units in neighborhoods?:** A balance needs to be struck in the amount of vacation rentals and non-primary residences and the number of full-time residents that live, work and play in South Lake Tahoe. Vacation rentals are a reality of South Lake Tahoe and generate transient occupancy tax that benefits the city of South Lake Tahoe. But when our town is made up of mostly non-permanent residents, vacation rentals can quickly take over a neighborhood. I look forward to reviewing the ordinance to see if a sensible balance can be achieved.

Your civic involvement is lacking, why should the public believe you have what it takes to step onto the City Council?: Civic engagement is defined as individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. My life in Tahoe is dedicated to addressing public concern – whether working to bring more skiers to our slopes and putting heads in beds, volunteer at community clean ups or lead the charge in the creation of the Elevate Your View summit last spring, which addressed community apathy. My lack of experience as an elected politician is exactly why people should vote for me – our town needs new blood and fresh ideas within City Council. I’m not a career politician; I’m a homeowner who wants to create a future here for my family and everyone else.

Tell the voters something about yourself that they may not know: I came to South Lake Tahoe as a child once every winter to toboggan and saucer on the local hills and those trips to my aunt’s cabin are the foundation for my love of South Lake Tahoe. My wife and I left Tahoe for two years and were eager to return to South Lake Tahoe to help this community move forward. Service also runs deep in my family. My two male role models growing up served their communities in different ways. My maternal grandfather was a CTA representative who helped his fellow teachers negotiate for fair wages and compensation,

sometimes working past midnight on projects after putting his five children to bed. My father was a union representative at a paint factory in the Bay Area representing over 50 coworkers. I come from humble roots, my father's side of the family is from Mexico, and I'm proud of my grandparents for coming to the California to make a better life for themselves and their family. I think of myself at the epitome of the American Dream when seen through their eyes, I've achieved more than I ever thought I could in my life and I look forward to a progressive future for South Lake Tahoe.