

Editorial: Elect Romsos, Wallace to STPUD



Shane Romsos



Duane Wallace

Publisher's note: *Lake Tahoe News* convened an editorial panel of seven community members to come up with this endorsement.

Most people don't think about their water or sewer provider until the flow in either direction isn't working. But South Tahoe Public Utility District has been in the news of late because of rate and salary increases.

When considering which of the four candidates to vote for on Nov. 4 we believe it is important to consider where our money is going. While we believe infrastructure and paying people a decent wage are important, the ratepayers should not be fleeced to do either or both.

We need people on the South Tahoe PUD board who can vote no. We need people who are not myopic in their vision. We need people who understand how to compromise for the greater good.

This is why *Lake Tahoe News* is endorsing Shane Romsos and Duane Wallace.

Romsos is new to the political arena, but not to the workings of Lake Tahoe. He is taking on Jim Jones, who was on the STPUD

board for 12 years beginning in 1977, was off for four years and has been on since 1993.

We know Romsos is passionate about whatever he takes on, and hope this approach will carry forward to the STPUD board. In his work life he has come prepared to meetings, been professional and asked the appropriate questions – traits needed to be a successful board member.

His time working as a research scientist for Spatial Informatics Group – an environmental think tank specializing in landscape analysis to inform good natural resource policy and management, along with employment at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and U.S. Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit will make him a better informed board member.

Romsos has also demonstrated that he can be forward thinking. We expect he will bring new ideas to the board and not be an automatic yes for more, more, more.

While we commend Jones for his tenure on the board, it has been disappointing to watch him vote time after time for raises for employees. We question why he was an advocate for rate increases last spring for infrastructure and at no time broached the subject of employee raises. And while improved water lines for fire capacity, storage and pump stations are necessary, so is a balanced approach to get these things. Jones has had an all-or-nothing mentality that is not good for the district or ratepayers.

He needs to be replaced with someone who is much more conscious of the district's ratepayers.

When it comes to the other STPUD race between Duane Wallace and Andy Chapman, the choice is easy – Wallace by a landslide.

Wallace, while he has been on the board before and has baggage, also has experience. He would be replacing Eric Schafer, a longtime board member who is stepping down.

Wallace can listen; he can take direction. What he needs to do more of is be a team player and not take all the credit for accomplishments as he has done in the past.

He needs to listen to ratepayers, not just staff and employees.

We hope he will utilize his vast STPUD experience with independent thinking to make astute decisions that keep the district's rates down, yet provide the same great service.

Wallace also has the desire to be involved beyond attending monthly meetings, which is more than can be said of some of the continuing board members. He has been to Washington, D.C., to lobby on behalf of the district, he knows the players inside and outside the basin. In this age of diminishing dollars and escalating needs, the ability to hit the floor running is critical.

Chapman is a recent transplant to California from Nevada. He doesn't attend STPUD meetings. He works on the North Shore in marketing for the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association. Nothing in his background points to being a viable member of any water and/or sewer board. And how can ratepayers take him seriously when he snubbed them by refusing to answer questions submitted to him by *Lake Tahoe News*?

Romsos and Wallace will complement the existing board, bring varied backgrounds to the table, and keep an eye on the needs of the district infrastructure while being mindful of the ratepayers' wallets.

Fiscal responsibility needs to become a mantra of the district. We don't need another *Taj Mahal*, as the administrative building is often referred to. We don't need the district giving out sweetheart deals involving bulk rate water and expensive pump station upgrades at the ratepayers' expense as was done for Heavenly Mountain Resort for enhanced snow making. Nor do we need more public figures benefitting

from special favors at the ratepayers' expense.

None of this should ever happen again.