

Conner: 'There is absolutely no proof to anything I have been accused of'



South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman JoAnn Conner on Oct. 16 says she is the one being bullied, not the other way around. Photo/Jessie Marchesseau

By Jessie Marchesseau

The South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce met Friday evening to allow JoAnn Conner, former chamber president and South Lake Tahoe city councilwoman, to tell her side of the story.

Conner was **banned last month** from having interaction with city staff as a result of a list of allegations including verbal attacks on city employees and the city manager, being disrespectful to other councilmembers, and being hostile and demeaning to people during public meetings.

"There is absolutely no proof to anything I have been accused of," she told the chamber group Oct. 16. "I would like to

categorically state I have never, ever sworn, yelled at or threatened or done anything to intimidate a city employee including the city manager.”

However, *Lake Tahoe News* has been told proof will be forthcoming in the form of verbal testimony and emails from Conner during Monday’s special council meeting.

Conner said she is a passionate and straightforward person and realizes that there have been times when people felt she was too harsh. “And for that I apologize,” she said.

Conner went on to point out that none of her colleagues is without fault and they have all done things that were rude or inappropriate. She said she doesn’t know why they are focusing these accusations on her.

“I believe we have some issues with our employees, yes. But I don’t believe I am the cause of that. I think it is coming from another source, and have encouraged my fellow councilmembers to talk to our employees,” Conner continued.

She then addressed each of the seven allegations listed on the resolution which state that she has been:

1. On numerous occasions been disrespectful to councilmembers during public meetings;

Conner’s response: “I think that’s a matter of perspective. I think some of the other councilmembers have also been rude.”

2. Verbally attacked employees, including the city manager, resulting in a pattern of behavior that may constitute a potential hostile work environment;

Conner’s response: “Not true. Absolutely not true. No proof has been presented.”

3. Caused employees to seek advice and assistance from the

city attorney and/or city manager arising out of confrontations or interactions with Councilmember Conner;

Conner's response: "Where is the proof? When I asked the city attorney, 'Where is the proof?' the only instance he gave me was related to parking enforcement over two years ago"

4. Potentially subjected the city to litigation for the alleged behavior;

Conner's response: "Not true."

5. As a representative of the city and City Council, has acted in a manner that has caused the agency partners to decline to or be reluctant to work with Councilmember Conner;

Conner's response: "Again, where is the proof of that?" She said she could think of one instance concerning the senior subcommittee when she had a bit of a disagreement with El Dorado County Supervisor Sue Novasel.

6. Been hostile and demeaning to persons who have provided testimony or opinions in public meetings;

Conner's response: "I don't think so, but that's possible. I think that's a matter of perspective. And certainly there are people who could testify that just about every council member up there has done the same thing at some time."

7. Has acted in a manner during public meetings that has been alleged in an **editorial in local media** to be bullying, ridiculing and scolding, which impacts the respect the public has for the city and the City Council.

Conner's response: "Seriously? 'Alleged in a local publication.' None of that was true. The he-said, she-said, somebody-said is ridiculous. The comment about my having a CCW [carry concealed weapon] and the employees feeling threatened because I bring a loaded gun to government

property: Mr. (Kenny) Curtzwiler investigated that. It was very simple to prove I have never applied for, much less have I ever received a CCW. And I would like to know who has seen me carry a gun, because I have never carried a gun loaded or unloaded onto any government property.”

However, prior to it being published that Conner had a concealed weapon permit she told councilmembers, department heads and others she had one. Because there is no statewide registry for concealed weapon permits and the fact they expire it is not known if she was telling the truth when she previously boasted of having one or now when she denies having one.

Conner said when she requested information from City Attorney Tom Watson on specific instances of the alleged behavior, she was told employee complaints are confidential and he did not have exact dates or documentation of the behavior in question.

When attorney and former Councilman Bruce Grego asked Conner how she was supposed to defend herself against the allegations when the city won't release the confidential information they are based on, Conner said she didn't know. She went on to say she has been approached by several employees away from work who told her they don't feel threatened by her. She claims she is the one being bullied, not the other way around.

Conner said she believes this all came to a head when she challenged City Manager Nancy Kerry on what Conner believed were erroneous charges on some temporary activity permits and also had a disagreement with Kerry concerning the lease for the senior center.

Councilman Tom Davis was also in attendance Friday as a member of the chamber, but declined to join the discussion beyond saying: “There's two sides to every story, and you're going to hear both sides on Monday. So that's the time to come and listen, and whatever evidence there is will be presented to

both sides.”

A special meeting concerning the possible **censuring of Conner** is scheduled for Oct. 19 at 3pm at Lake Tahoe Airport.