

# SLT council to consider censuring Conner

By Kathryn Reed

The South Lake Tahoe City Council will consider censuring Councilmember JoAnn Conner at a special meeting on Oct. 19.

Mayor Hal Cole called for the meeting to address the behavior and language of Conner toward multiple city employees as well as her interactions with colleagues. He said she is creating a hostile work environment.

Cole told *Lake Tahoe News* the exact wording of the agenda is being worked out, but that two items will likely be on it:

1. A vote to support City Manager Nancy Kerry's decision to ban Conner from having one-on-one access with any staff member.

"We don't have to do this. I'm concerned with what I'm hearing and reading that JoAnn is making this personal between her and Nancy. It is not personal. It is about protecting the city. It sends a message that it is not just Nancy doing this, that we concur," Cole said.

2. There will be a resolution brought forward to censure Conner.

If the majority of the council votes to censure Conner, she will still be able to do her job. It is essentially a vote to say they object to her behavior. At the local level impeachment is not an option by the council.

"When I feel my employees have been threatened, I need to protect them and the city coffers," Cole told *LTN*.

**Last month** Kerry told the council she would no longer allow

Conner to interact with staff and vice versa.

Conner's abusive behavior has been the norm for the nearly three years she has been on the council, according to city staff. Non-city staff has told *Lake Tahoe News* many stories about Conner's vulgarity and hostility. Those interactions, though, point to a pattern of behavior, but are not anything the council can address.

In February the council had an open meeting during the weekend strategic planning session in which the five aired concerns about Conner's behavior. Tears were shed and an honest dialog was had. Later that weekend Conner called it healing. The other four believed Conner when she said change would be forthcoming.

Cole said Conner took some responsibility in February for her behavior, but since then she has reverted to her old tactics of bullying.

Those tactics reportedly include abusive, threatening, repulsive and belittling comments. This, by definition, is harassment.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission says harassment is when "the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive."

The EEOC goes on to say, "The victim does not have to be the person harassed, but can be anyone affected by the offensive conduct."

Conner – as are all the council members – is the boss of the city manager and city attorney. They in turn have an obligation to protect their respective employees or they could be held individually liable. Stopping the interaction between Conner and staff is a form of protection.

Conner was not available for comment late Wednesday. However, she has been active on social media in pleading her case. On Facebook she posted, "I still have no information on the specific charges, just lots of innuendo and hearsay, therefore I cannot explain it, defend it, or change it." She claims her challenge of the sign permit fee has something to do with what is going on. Cole said the sign permit is irrelevant to what is going on.

She sent a letter to a number of people on Oct. 7, which was forwarded to *LTN*. In it she begs for support.

The email said, "I believe this is a power play to silence the voice of the people. I have always been different from the other Council Members, and am the most active advocate for the 'little people,' veterans, seniors, and small business owners.

"I believe they do not like that I do not automatically defer to Nancy Kerry or go along with their agenda. They cannot attack me on my work, as I have accomplished too many good things for the people, so I believe they are attempting to attack me on innuendo and hearsay, to tarnish my reputation, so I will either quit or not run again in 2016."

At no point does she address the allegations made against her about her conduct. She will have an opportunity in 11 days to do so at the special meeting.

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**Notes:**

- The meeting is Oct. 19 at 3pm at Lake Tahoe Airport.