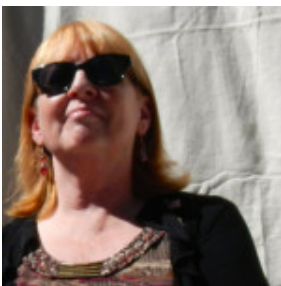


State complaint filed against SLT councilwoman

By Kathryn Reed

A formal complaint has been filed with the Fair Political Practices Commission against South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman JoAnn Conner.

The allegation stems from Conner's participation in the city's **parade policy discussion** at the last council meeting because her business is a beneficiary of that policy.



JoAnn Conner

Conner at the March 1 meeting referenced a letter from the FPPC that said there was no conflict.

That letter dated Dec. 12, 2012, was sent to then City Attorney Patrick Enright from Jack Woodside, FPPC senior counsel. Enright had inquired about Conner's potential conflict to produce a parade in the city while being on the council, as well if there would be a conflict with her obtaining the necessary permits from the city. The advice was that those things did not present a conflict.

The letter, though, goes on to say, "A conflict of interest may exist only if an official will make, participate in making, or influence a government decision. (Section 87100; Regulation 18700(b)(2).)"

Making a decision includes voting, which is what happened last meeting. Until that meeting it did not appear Conner violated the FPPC conflict of interest law.

Conner did not return a phone call.

Brooke Laine filed the complaint against Conner. The two at one time were on the council together.

“This is the most egregious violation of the law that I have seen in my 20 years of being involved in politics,” Laine told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Laine is adamant public policy is created for the betterment of the community, not for elected officials to profit by, whether that is financially or in some other way.

Conner earlier this month said her business does not profit from the parades, but that she puts them on for charities. However, in documentation Laine filed with the FPPC Conner multiple times on Facebook states how if she were not able to put on the Fourth of July parade, this would hurt her business.

Council members receive regular training in ethics and the Brown Act – California’s open meeting law, so it’s not like any member could say they were unaware of the law or potential conflicts.

“Her breach of all of those laws and her minimizing those laws is atrocious,” Laine said.

The FPPC letter went on to say, “In addition to the prohibition against making or participating in making a governmental decision, the conflict-of-interest provisions of the Act also prohibit a public official from influencing a governmental decision when the decision will have a reasonably foreseeable material financial effect on the official’s economic interests.”

It will be up to the FPPC's enforcement division to review the complaint and make a finding. If the FPPC determines wrongdoing did occur, then disciplinary action would be handed down.

"Things range from an advisory letter, which says we don't have sufficient evidence to prove a violation, but we advise you to be careful about this type of situation, here are the laws, facts, etc. The second next step up would be a warning letter, which is a finding of a violation but is not considered serious enough to warrant a fine. A warning letter is, however, considered a prior if there are future violations, and will be a factor in future penalties," Jay Wierenga with the FPPC told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Then you get into the level of fines ... usually ranging from a start in the low hundreds up to the \$5,000 per (violation). Penalties are based on a number of factors, including complexity of the case, seriousness of the violation, harm to the public like was vital information withheld right before an election that could've affected the outcome."