

El Dorado County hires CAO from within

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County will have a new chief administrative officer beginning at 8am May 25.

At today's Board of Supervisors meeting Don Ashton was unanimously hired.



Don Ashton

He knows what he is getting into, the systemic dysfunction, the questionable hires from predecessors and a budget process that is a mess.

The 45-year-old is currently the director of the county's largest department, Health and Human Services.

Ashton told *Lake Tahoe News* his top three priorities are:

1. "The budget and the budget process overall, not just the current year, but establishing a more timely budget process moving forward."
2. "Our culture ... (creating) one of collaboration and trust based on following the county's strategic plan."
3. "Looking at the organizational structure of the county, making sure people are in the right spots and moving them to

where they would be most effective.”

Ashton has been with the county for a little more than five years, including working for the sheriff’s department. He moved here from Los Angeles County to be near to his fiancé, who is now his wife.

He knew after about two years of working for El Dorado County that he would like to be CAO. The timing, he said, was right for it to happen now. Ashton will be making nearly \$215,000 year, plus benefits.

“Right now we have an outstanding board that is committed to changing the culture,” Ashton said. “No doubt it is going to be a lot of work.”

The county has gone through a handful of CAOs in the last few years who have had a penchant for hiring their friends and spending money on personnel instead of the basic needs of residents – like roads and other infrastructure.

Larry Combs has been the acting CAO for nearly a year, working part time and living in Auburn.

Ashton has the support of other elected officials in the county – all who wrote a **letter** in April to the board backing him.

He knows the days ahead won’t be easy, especially with budget hearing coming next month. Still, Ashton said he looks forward to the challenge.

“The way I’m going to go about it is to be as transparent and open as possible,” Ashton said. “I’m going to try to get the trust of the community, the board and other department heads.”