

South Lake Tahoe city attorney calling it quits

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe City Attorney Tom Watson tendered his resignation Aug. 16, with his last day being at the end of September.



Tom Watson

Watson told council members he is leaving to become city attorney for Tracy.

When he was hired in May 2013 he told *Lake Tahoe News* the Tahoe position was a “dream job.” Clearly, things changed. He did not return calls Wednesday.

Mayor Austin Sass said he was not surprised Watson is leaving based on his wife living in Fresno, which is where he lived before taking the Tahoe job. She was not able to get a job in this area; she is the coordinator for the Department of Educational Leadership at California State University, Fresno.

The new job will put him much closer to his wife. There was a time she lived here, along with their daughter. She is now in college.

Watson has been a victim of the housing shortage in the basin. He never owned here, and has had to move when his long-term rental became a vacation home. Being gone so much for personal

reasons he never made Tahoe his home and was not immersed in the community.

“I enjoyed working with Tom. I enjoyed the fact that he had a background in private industry and a public service background. I thought his perspective on things was good,” Sass told *Lake Tahoe News*. “He could look at things from both sides of the aisle, so to speak.”

Sass and Councilwoman Wendy David plan to meet with City Manager Nancy Kerry this afternoon to discuss how to proceed. The entire council at the Sept. 5 meeting will likely make a decision about the next steps.

The two city employees who report directly to the council are the city manager and city attorney; therefore, they are the ones who hire, fire and review those individuals. This will be the first time Sass, David and Councilmember Jason Collin have gone through this process for either of those jobs. David, though, was part of Lake Tahoe Unified School District’s board when Diane Scheerhorn and Jim Tarwater were hired as superintendent.

Most likely the city will hire a consulting firm to aid in the search. Inevitably it will take several months to fill the position. And depending on how much time that person would need to give notice it could be after the winter holidays before someone is on board.

Watson is leaving at a time when two key issues are before the City Council. It’s likely the revise of the vacation home rental ordinance will essentially be written next month before he leaves, but the marijuana issue could be unresolved.

In the interim, the city has a deputy city attorney and a legal secretary. The city also contracts with Burke, Williams & Sorensen LLP out of Oakland for Nira Doherty to come up once a month for one week. Doherty was the assistant city attorney for South Lake Tahoe before leaving to be a partner in the

private law firm. On that firm's website she is listed as the assistant city attorney for South Lake Tahoe, though on the city's website there is no mention of her.

Nonetheless, Doherty is well versed in many city legal issues. She gave the last presentation about marijuana and will likely be at the workshop later this month.