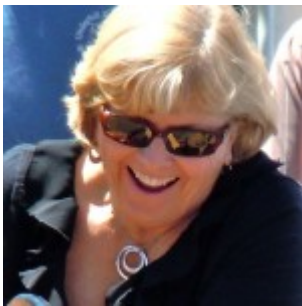


Opinion: Wanting to converse

By Wendy David

First, a confession of weirdness. I love being a part of groups. I like the synergy of groups, how they work collaboratively, how the room sounds ... some listening, others talking.

I like the process of group decision-making, the back and forth, the quiet and noisy, the aha moments of clarity, that groups have goals and purpose. It may be quirky, but instead of being drained from being with and working in a group, I find it energizing.



So, with that confession, it is no surprise to hear that I really enjoyed the inaugural coffee and **conversation with the mayor** on Jan. 24 at Peet's Coffee inside Raley's.

I arrived a bit early, saw Mayor Pro Tem Tom Davis, whom I had invited to join me, bought my latte and sat down to wait. I had no idea what to expect, but was looking forward with anticipation to conversing with whomever joined me, hoping that they, too, were hungry for real conversation about our city issues as well. Back and forth, face to face, group listening, group talking.

First three people pulling around the small table, then 10. OK, I think, we will need three little tables to gather around. Then 20. Hmm, a few will need to stand. Then 30, standing, sitting, leaning. Some participants happened upon us by accident, first curious and then comfortable at joining in.

It was an amazingly diverse group, new faces mixing with old

acquaintances, many regular City Council attendees and a few community and public agency folks as well. Remember my weirdness confession earlier? I loved it.

I invited each person to give their name and state one topic that they were interested in having a conversation about. VHRs, SnowGlobe, cannabis, roads, the Echo Summit bridge replacement project, arts and culture in our city, loitering and vagrancy issues were all discussed. The respect and consideration for each speaker and for Davis and myself as the council members was appreciated. Divergent views made for an interesting and educational, open and varied hour with many topics and many opinions.

I need to have conversation with you. We, as a council need you. Our city has very big topics to discuss and debate and then culminating with big decisions to be made in 2018. We are your elected body. You are the electorate, the body we represent, the body of voters. Our community of voters is divided on many important issues that will continue to come before the council. On each topic, most of you have an opinion, a bias, a belief. The council must take in information, hear your opinions, study and become educated on all aspects of an issue and then vote in the best interests of the electorate as a whole and not the individual.

Good decisions require meeting and talking, conversing and debating, seeking to understand, even if we do not agree. I would argue that throwing out negative and personal barbs at each other through social media does not contribute to the process. I would venture that sitting in groups, discussing the positive and negatives of topics, the alternatives and options does help the process.

Come to the next coffee and conversation with the mayor on Feb. 21 at the Senior Center from 9-10am. I'm pleased that Councilwoman Brooke Laine will be joining me that morning. Peet's was great, but it was suggested to seek a venue without

the music and loudspeaker in the background. It did have its own ambiance for sure.

Come to our Cannabis workshop as well. It will be on Feb. 20 at 5pm, the location to still be determined. The council chambers have proven a bit tight for some of our community topics of late.

If you like being a groupie of sorts, like me, you are in for a fun year of learning, discussing, debating, disagreeing and even agreeing. Please join in.

See you for coffee, see you at the council meetings, see you for the cannabis workshop, all in February. Coffee and conversation with the Mayor will take place on the Wednesday morning after the second council meeting of the month through November.

It's OK to be a little weird about loving groups and having real conversation.

Wendy David is mayor of South Lake Tahoe.