

Opinion: SLT unraveling as each day goes on

By Kathryn Reed

It's hard to know who is in charge of the city of South Lake Tahoe. It could be the firefighters since their chief is acting city manager. Take a look at the agendas since the full time city manager left – more fire related items than usual.

And with this being an election year, it usually bodes well for incumbents to be throwing cash in the direction of fire and police.

It didn't take long for the need for a dedicated city manager to become evident. It also has become crystal clear how the council is not effective.

Lake Tahoe News sent this email to all five South Lake Tahoe City Council members on March 23: "I have never seen a staff report not have someone's name on it as is the case with the cannabis report for (March 27). How is there accountability? Is this a policy individually or as a group you have endorsed? What are your thoughts about it? And the fact that the agenda item regarding TWC says the info won't be ready until (March 27), I've never seen anything like that either. Any comment?"

Here are the responses:

Councilmember Brooke Laine: "I am discouraged by the lack of transparency and also concerned about the lack of respect for our internal processes. Every single staff report I have ever read indicates the author of the report and in fact is signed by the author of the report and further acknowledged by signature of the city manager and/or department head."

Councilmember Tom Davis: No response.

Councilmember Jason Collin: *No response.*

Councilmember Austin Sass: *No response.*

Councilmember Wendy David: *No response.*

Usually the person who wrote the report signs it as well as the city manager or the department head.

This isn't the first agenda guffaw since Nancy Kerry left the city manager's office.

City staff scrambled to get the March 20 agenda out on time. Usually it is posted the Thursday afternoon before the Tuesday meeting. It was out Friday. And while that was within the 72-hour time allotment per state law, it did not happen smoothly. On top of that, the cannabis item then had no supporting material, with the two presentations added to the online agenda the morning of the meeting.

During the meeting *Lake Tahoe News* asked Tracy Sheldon, city public information officer, for copies of those presentations. She said she didn't have them. *LTN* said someone does. The dialogue stopped there.

The Brown Act mandates that every member of the public has a right to hard copies of any item before the council. In this case it didn't matter because the topic was put off until 4pm today.

But the issues about last Tuesday's meeting aren't over. On the evening of March 20, I emailed the mayor asking her if there was reportable action from closed session that occurred after that day's regular council meeting.

Her response: "Yes. Reporting out on negotiations. I did not bring home the language of the report out. Susie has it." [That would be a reference to City Clerk Suzie Alessi.]

In other words, Mayor David and presumably the other four

electeds just spent about \$1 million a year in perpetuity on employees, but she couldn't remember this fact or how it was divvied up.

Alessi told *Lake Tahoe News*: "The City Council approved memorandums of understanding with the following bargaining units: South Lake Tahoe Police Officers Association, Local 39-Admin/Confidential, South Lake Tahoe Police Employees Association, South Lake Tahoe Fire Association, South Lake Tahoe Police Supervisors Association. These memorandums of understanding will be brought to the City Council for execution during open session on April 3."

However, what Ember Buckman, human resources analyst for the city, told LTN was, "The city of South Lake Tahoe City Council ratified four MOUs and approved one tentative agreement on March 20."

Adding to the confusion is that the council on **Jan. 23 had already approved the contracts** with Local 39 and the police officers' bargaining unit. No one at the city has answered the question as to whether something changed on March 20.

It is actually unusual for any elected body to report what happened regarding negotiations until the labor groups have ratified the agreement.

The topic is on a closed session so the city's negotiating team can give updates to the electeds. It's the electeds who give direction to the team – such as agreeing to the cumulative dollar amount to be spent, which union might get more, whether pay would be retroactive and other benefits.

And the actual facts about the agreements are usually on an open session agenda, with no reportable action until then. This has a lot to do with who signs first and if there needs to be further negotiations. For example, members of Local 39 initially voted down the contract.

Usually when the vote is taken in open session about labor contracts the fiscal impact to the city is provided at that time. The city has this week to get that together before next week's regular meeting.

With the difficulty the police department has had with recruiting, boosting the pay was a given.

What isn't in these agreements is the fact the council last week agreed to fund three new positions for the fire department. The idea is this will help cut back on overtime which runs about a half million dollars a year. When firefighters lobbied for more employees in 2014 to cut overtime it had little impact – other than to increasing staffing, and therefore the taxpayer burden to these employees in terms of salary, CalPERS and other benefits.

The council chose to increase staffing even though the city is in the middle of a study to assess staffing needs and other concerns of the fire department. The **fire department staffing** has been fluid for years. In part this has to do with internal chaos and in part the Great Recession demanding across the board cuts.

Here are some details about the contracts:

South Lake Tahoe Police Association (Police Employee Unit)

- Term: Oct. 1, 2017 through Dec. 31, 2018.
- City will pay \$250 month in health care not to exceed \$3,000/year.
- Salary increase of 3.5 percent per year.
- Employees will be pay an additional 1 percent to CalPERS.
- 1.5 percent of salaries will go into a non-PERSable 401(a), with city matching dollar-for-dollar up to \$2,000.

- Each represented employee receives a one-time payment of \$1,000.

South Lake Tahoe Firefighters' Association

- Term: Oct. 1, 2017 through Dec. 31, 2018.
- City will pay \$250 month in health care not to exceed \$3,000/year.
- 4.5 percent salary increase per year.
- Employees will pay an additional 1 percent to CalPERS.
- 2 percent of salaries will go into 401(a), with the city matching dollar-for-dollar up to \$3,000.
- Each represented employee receives a one-time payment of \$1,000.
- An increase of eight hours accrued vacation.

South Lake Tahoe International Union of Operating Engineer, Stationary Engineers, Local 39 Administrative & Confidential Association

- Term: Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 2018.
- Health reimbursement of \$3,000 a year.
- 3 percent salary increase.
- Employees pay 1 percent more to CalPERS.
- \$2,000 into 401(a).
- 50 percent matching contribution into 401(a) up to a maximum of \$2,500.

South Lake Tahoe Police Officers Association

- Term: Oct. 1, 2017, through Dec. 31, 2018.

- Health reimbursement of \$3,500 a year.
- 2 percent salary increase effective Oct. 1, 2017; 2.5 percent increase effective Jan. 1, 2018.
- Employees paying 1 percent more to CalPERS.
- Lump sum of \$1,500 into 401(a) effective January 2018 (probationary employees excluded); lump sum of \$1,000 into 401(a) effective March 2018; lump sum of 2 percent of base salary into 401(a) effective March 2018; lump sum \$1,000 into 401(a) effective October 2018.
- Dollar-for-dollar matching contribution into 401(a) up to a maximum of \$1,500.
- Vacation accrual increase by eight hours.

South Lake Tahoe Police Supervisors Association (tentative agreement)

- Term: Oct. 1, 2017 through Dec. 31, 2018.
- \$250/month or total \$3,000/year for medical.
- Sworn personnel – 4.5 percent salary increase in exchange for employee's additional 1 percent cost sharing pension contribution.
- Non-sworn personnel – 3.5 percent salary increase in exchange for employee's additional 1 percent cost sharing pension contribution.
- Sworn personnel – 1.5 percent of salary into 401(a); dollar-for-dollar matching contribution into 401(a) up to a maximum of \$2,500.
- Non-sworn personnel – 1 percent of salary into 401(a); dollar-for-dollar matching contribution into 401(a) up to a maximum of \$2,500.

- Additional pay of \$1,000 to each represented employee effective October 2018.

Other:

- Battalion chiefs will get a shift stipend of \$1,512 for additional 24-hour shifts (pro-rated for shifts less than 24 hours); fire chief may approve administrative time off for extra duty assignments more than four hours.

No one has said when negotiations will start up again since these contracts only go through the end of the year.