

Opinion: Taking issue with council colleague's accusations

By Wendy David

The last few months have been some of the most difficult for our City Council, for our city and for our community. Similar to the national conversation, with immediate access to social media in many forms, controversial opinion pieces go immediately out to the public, even before the accused have an opportunity to hear the allegations. Soon after, public comment and "opinion" on the opinion begins with little interest in whether there is truth.



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I have very seldom felt the need to respond publicly, but Ms. [Brooke] Laine invites and demands this public response by making her concerns and opinion very public, while stating that she is providing information. I would like to respond to a few of her opinions, accusations and allegations.

I would like to address the truth in reference to the minutes that were approved at the April 3 meeting. Ms. Laine was absent. Very often the minutes of a meeting have corrections made to them after review by council, the city manager or department heads, before they are formally adopted by the council. In this case, Ms. Laine noticed a transcription error

in a motion that had been made which added additional language that was not part of the motion. She contacted our city clerk the day before our meeting, who then took action and publicly amended the minutes during the public meeting before they were adopted. She gave credit to Ms. Laine for advising her of the error. It is common to have the minutes corrected, often in public. I have done it myself on a few occasions.

I take great exception to the comment of secrecy taking place in local government. Ms. Laine states, "If one councilmember is not privy to the same information as other councilmembers the question is why?" All information is equally available to every councilmember. Calls to the acting city manager, interim city attorney, city clerk, and city staff do not go unanswered. The mayor and the mayor pro tem do meet and confer on the proposed agenda one week before the meeting, but these meetings in no way preclude any councilmember from being provided the same information.

Surprisingly, although Ms. Laine alleges that transparency is lacking, in a stunningly secretive display, she let no one know in advance of her decision to publicly accuse her fellow council members, her acting city manager, city clerk and interim city attorney of breaking the law.

Her accusation of decision-making taking place outside of the public's view could not be further from the truth. As a council, we very publicly discuss, deliberate and reach decisions at our meetings in front of the public. For anyone that has attended a meeting, this should be obvious as you watch the council debate, sometimes vigorously and with passion our most controversial topics. We have tough decisions that take many meetings of discussion to thoroughly and thoughtfully vet through all of the options. This can be frustrating for the public and for the council, but is an integral part of public government. I am offended and devastated to learn that this is Ms. Laine's belief.

Ms. Laine further accuses the council of engaging in a power struggle, one that is for personal gain and is selfish, creates hostility and purposely keeps many in the dark. I do not know who she is referring to, but her statement is false and unfounded. She speaks against our city's public servants that step up and out to serve the public in today's polarized culture. For me, this elected position certainly is not one that has provided any personal gain. In fact, quite the opposite is true. The sleepless nights, the huge weight of knowing that I must always act in the best interests of the entire city's community, not just one person or one opinion, before supporting any action, the lack of being at liberty legally to comment on any item that is confidential and restricted to closed session all take a considerable toll for any responsible and professional person.

Because of the gravity of Ms. Laine's false accusations, as mayor, I have made a recommendation to our chief of police to initiate conversation with the El Dorado County district attorney to investigate Ms. Laine's numerous allegations that "multiple violations of the law have occurred."

I am saddened and disappointed that Ms. Laine has taken this path and holds these damaging opinions. I hope that we can find a path back and provide the community, the City Council, city staff and other elected and appointed officials facts and truth as opposed to opinion and biased conjecture. I believe a thorough and independent investigation will provide this.

Wendy David is mayor of South Lake Tahoe.