

SLT council to discuss allegations of wrongdoing

By Kathryn Reed

Even though the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office has initiated an investigation into allegations of illegal activities by the South Lake Tahoe City Council, the five local officials want an airing of grievances at the next council meeting.

Councilwoman Brooke Laine started the latest firestorm with her **opinion piece** published on *Lake Tahoe News* on April 14 where she alleges illegal conduct by herself and her colleagues.

Laine in her column mentions the Mary Egan contract. She wrote, "To this day, that contract has never been addressed, corrected, or publicly acknowledged."

At the end of the April 17 council meeting, acting City Manager Jeff Meston said the MRG bill needs to be paid and that he wants to discuss it at the next meeting. MRG or Municipal Resource Group, is Egan's company. Egan was brought in last fall at the request of then Mayor Austin Sass to assess the culture of the city. The contract was never discussed in open session.

However, *LTN* was told that **contract was paid** through the city's law firm Burke, Williams & Sorensen at the request of interim City Attorney Nira Doherty.

That contract is one of the examples Laine has of an alleged Brown Act violation.

Laine's column was followed two days later by Mayor Wendy David's **rebuttal**. David said she wanted the DA to investigate

Laine's accusations.

Laine on Tuesday said she had been contacted by the DA's office and said two investigators have been assigned to the case.

She said the entire council should have weighed in on the decision to go to the DA, that it should not have been initiated by the mayor.

Councilman Jason Collin said he wants to discuss Laine's accusations in public and to "do it swiftly so we can get back on track."

Sass read the following into the record during council comments:

"First, I wish I could share everything that happened in closed session with the public. Every vote, their preceding discussions and the information and personal comments shared to us. I believe that doing such would clear this entire matter up and truly show who had the city's best interests at heart and who impeded the process because of a lack of objectivity. Unfortunately, the California Brown Act legally prohibits that.

"At no time have I sat in a meeting or with council or had a conversation with Ms. Laine where she ever used the words corruption, personal gain, power struggle or many of the comments she stated in her opinion piece. She has never abstained from a vote, protested a vote, or raised the issue that a particular vote was illegal. Thus, without discussing specifics with council members, I hope Ms. Laine plans to share whatever evidence she has with the presiding and appropriate legal authority which I understand to be the district attorney. I hope the public is asking themselves the obvious question, 'What is she talking about, who is she talking about and why didn't she lodge an official confidential complaint like most

whistle blowers do so an unbiased investigation can occur?'

"Corruption is generally defined as a form of dishonesty undertaken by a person entrusted with a position of authority, often to acquire personal benefit. Corruption may include many activities including bribery and embezzlement. Strong words for our little town. I do not believe for one moment that Tom, Jason, Wendy and myself personally benefited from any council vote or knowingly participated in any criminal activity. I look forward to the DA's investigation and sincerely hope that all matters discussed in closed session can legally become public through such process."

The council agreed the issue needs to be discussed and not just left with the DA. To bring a topic back to the next meeting requires a four-fifths vote of the council, otherwise it would be at least two council meetings down the road. All five agreed the allegations should get a public airing at the May 1 meeting.