

SLT council OKs controversial consultant contract

By Kathryn Reed

On a 4-1 vote Tuesday the South Lake Tahoe City Council agreed to pay the consultant who was hired to evaluate the city, study the culture and look into the succession plan.

The MRG contract has been an issue for months. It started with not being approved in open session last fall when it was entered into. It wasn't until **earlier this month** that the council even brought it out into the open.

At that meeting it was agreed Wendy David and Tom Davis would be the council's subcommittee to decide whether a written report should be provided by the firm as was stated would be done in the original agreement, with legal counsel providing the pros and cons to do so.

There was no public discussion May 15 about the written report, nor was it even agendaized for a closed session discussion. In other words, at least some members of the council made the decision not to have a written document be provided without the full council's consent. Nor was the issue mentioned in the staff report.

It is the mayor – David – who decides what is on the agenda.

Egan provided a verbal accounting of her findings to the council in closed session. What she had to say has never been disclosed.

Clearly, a succession plan was not part of the report because the council went on to let the city manager go without a plan to replace her based on open session conversations and that it won't be until June that an interim city manager who isn't

staff will be on the city payroll.

The council's interim appointment of the fire chief didn't last long, as he told the council early on he wanted out.

Jeff Meston was not at Tuesday's meeting because he's on a business trip. Sitting in as acting city manager was Police Chief Brian Uhler. However, that decision was never discussed by the council. It was the fire chief who made the appointment. (The next council meeting should be overseen by Dirk Brazil, who was hired to be acting city manager.)

On May 15 the MRG contract was on the consent agenda, but was pulled by a member of the public for discussion.

Councilmember Brooke Laine, who was the lone dissenter on Tuesday's vote, said the scope of work in the agreement was not completed. She further stated, "The scope was changed and approved by somebody. It was not the council. Maybe that person needs to be responsible for the additional costs."

David said Mary Egan, principal with MRG, did complete the work she was hired to do.

Councilmember Jason Collin said, "I appreciate the work she did for us. It was consistent with the scope."

Councilman Austin Sass was of the belief the contract from MRG that requested even more money should be paid.

While Davis agreed to pay the lower, original amount, he sided with Laine in questioning how the scope of the agreement got changed.

This contract is part of the basis for Laine's allegations that the council has violated the Brown Act. The El Dorado County District Attorney's Office is investigating those allegations.