

Opinion: Alessi's resignation a welcome surprise

By Kathryn Reed

Quitting won't get Suzie Alessi what she wants.

What South Lake Tahoe's city clerk wants is for potentially damaging or embarrassing texts and emails about her and written by her to not see the light of day. The multiple entities that have sought the documents, including *Lake Tahoe News*, will continue to pursue the records whether she is in office or not.



Suzie Alessi

Alessi on June 19 announced at the City Council meeting she would be resigning in July. She did not give an exact date.

The City Council was shocked, according to Mayor Wendy David. "We had no idea," she told *Lake Tahoe News*. They knew she did not intend to seek re-election in November.

Alessi has come under fire of late because she doesn't do her job. She has it cushy because as an elected official she is only held accountable to the public – not the City Council, not the city manager, not the city attorney. She can work when she wants, take off whenever she wants.

Her latest shenanigans regarding the delay of public records is to threaten to sue to stop them from being made public. A

lawsuit may delay things, but it won't change the law. It is what it is.

There are very few instances where public records cannot be released. State law dictates what can be redacted. If she thinks the information won't be relevant after the taxpayers are no longer paying her to barely work, she is sorely mistaken. After all, we'll be the ones footing her six-figure retirement. After 32 years on the public dole she will continue to be on it. She will collect about 90 percent of her salary and that goes up about 2 percent a year. Her current salary is more than \$100,000.

It is only the city attorney and an elected city clerk who may redact anything from a public record. Most cities don't have elected clerks, and therefore it would only be legal counsel with the big black marker.

On June 1, Alessi emailed *LTN* saying, "Retrieval of the voluminous records subject to your public records request is nearly completed. If not all records are retrieved/received by early next week, the city will provide the records it has in its possession and the remainder will be provided to you as soon as received."

No records have been provided. None. Zero. Zip.

They have all been retrieved, so to speak, according to multiple sources at the city.

It is the city clerk, though, whose job it is to be in charge of Public Records Act requests – even when she is the subject of the request.

State law requires the city have a clerk, though it does not have to be elected. About 100 of the 478 incorporated cities in California have elected clerks.

There is nothing in the city's code that dictates how to

replace a city clerk who does not fulfill her term.

Clearly, the system is flawed.

Alessi can't leave soon enough. She has brought such disgrace to the office.

She couldn't get along with the deputy clerk and ran her off earlier this spring. Speculation is Ellen Palazzo will run for the position in November. The filing period opens July 16.

There is an assistant clerk, Sue Blankenship, who would be left with the immediate duties.

Alessi told *LTN*, "It's time – a changing of the guard."

That's an understatement.

Interim City Attorney Nira Doherty told *LTN* she expects to make a recommendation this week to interim City Manager Dirk Brazil about how to proceed.

Brazil told *LTN* he is leaning toward filling the post from July to November with a retired city clerk. "I don't see this position being 40 hours," Brazil said.

Still, it is up to the City Council to decide what to do. And those five would be the ones to make an appointment.