

Opinion: Dysfunction becoming the norm in SLT

By Kathryn Reed

Ten days. That's how much longer the residents of South Lake Tahoe have to put up with an ineffective city clerk.

The city on July 24 sent out a notice saying Suzie Alessi has finally said Aug. 3 will be her last day. On **June 29** she first announced her intent to leave her elected post early. Then on **July 9** she told *Lake Tahoe News* she didn't know when she would be quitting.

Alessi has been the elected city clerk since 2002; after having started in that department in 1986. Her term was to end at the end of the year. Instead she is choosing to be a quitter, to not fulfill her duty to the public who elected her.

It's not like she's around much, so it's hard to know if she'll really be missed.

She still hasn't produced the public records *Lake Tahoe News* sought months ago. This goes against the advice of the city's legal counsel. In fact, the interim city attorney has told *LTN* that if she had the power to release the records, they would have long ago been provided.

The documents have been assembled, just not released.

Alessi doesn't want them to potentially be published because part of what has been requested is her text messages. In the texts she reportedly talks about her stint in rehab and trashes the former city manager. Also reportedly in the documents are incriminating emails from Tracy Sheldon, the city's communication's director, and Councilman Austin Sass.

Those two allegedly had much to do with the smear campaign against the former city manager.

Alessi thinks that by not releasing the records they won't see the light of day because I have said July 31 is *LTN's* last day of publication under my ownership. But as of today, I'll still own the news site in August. I can publish whatever I want whenever I want – or not. I can also write for another local publication; one of which has agreed to let me write the Public Records Act story when it's ready, or I can provide them the info.

I have also been approached to file a lawsuit against the city to get the records. State law mandates that if I were to prevail, the city would have to pay my legal bills. So, I wouldn't be out of pocket any cash and my attorney wouldn't either. However, I believe this would be a huge waste of city (aka taxpayer money).

Still, sometimes it's necessary to do the uncomfortable thing because it's the right thing. Oh, wait, that should apply to the city clerk, not me. Come 'on Suzie, do the right thing – your job – and release the records. The city attorney keeps telling you to. Are you really going to make a judge be the one to tell you to?

And show up to work between now and your quitting day.

The mayor told *Lake Tahoe News* that Alessi “was an incredible source of information for the council.” Whatever. She doesn't work for the council; she works for the public. At least she is supposed to.

That's one of the odd things about having an elected city clerk, which is more of an anomaly than the norm in California.

Dealing with election filings – applications as well as financial documents – is part of the clerk's responsibility.

This is a big year locally with seats open on the City Council, Lake Tahoe Community College, Lake Tahoe Unified School District, South Tahoe Public Utility District and more.

Interim City Manager Dirk Brazil was asked if the city clerk's office will be able to handle the election duties.

"That's the big question – what is the clerk's office staffing level required in an election year?" Brazil told *LTN*.

While the elected clerk is not a city employee and only accountable to the public, the deputy city clerk is a city employee. But the one the city has isn't qualified to run the office based on job criteria if it were not an elected position. To be elected one only needs to be 18 and live in the city.

Per state law the city must have a city clerk. The council has 60 days from Alessi's departure date to replace her. This could be with an interim person much like the city manager and city attorney.

Originally Brazil told *LTN* he planned to talk to the council today about the clerk's position during the special meeting. *LTN* reminded him the clerk position was not on the agenda, only the city manager and city attorney positions were. If the clerk is discussed, this would be a violation of the Brown Act. The District Attorney's Office is already looking into whether the council has violated the opening meeting law; is it really necessary to provide investigators with more ammunition?

South Lake Tahoe deserves better elected representation than it has. Run for office and vote.