

# Opinion: SLT city clerk defiant with public's trust

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe's city clerk is obstructing the public's access to public records.

On July 8, *Lake Tahoe News* asked the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office to get involved.

Deputy DA Jim Clinchard responded to *LTN* by saying, "Potential [Public Records Act] violations are not criminal conduct which would be investigated by the District Attorney's Office.

"However, if there is a claim that a public agency may be purposefully and willfully trying to subvert the transparency laws covered by the PRA, then it may fall under the purview of the El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury. As advisors to the civil grand jury, we may be able to assist them in looking into this matter. If you believe the agency is purposefully and willfully trying to subvert the transparency laws, please send us any and all evidence or documents which would support this claim and we will review the matter and if appropriate discuss it with the newly impaneled civil grand jury."

I forwarded them information/evidence.

Timing, though, doesn't work in the public's favor. The 2018-19 grand jury was just seated on July 1. Traditionally reports are released in June as their year of service concludes, which is 11 months from now.

Alessi will be long gone by then because she has said she is either going to retire before her term ends or won't run for re-election in November. So whatever hand slap and written scolding the grand jury might come out with will have little

impact. Maybe, though, their findings would make the next clerk think twice about not doing his/her job.

*Lake Tahoe News* and other entities earlier this year requested various records from the city. Requesting public records usually isn't any big deal; anyone can do so. A California public agency has 10 days to provide the records, unless there are extenuating circumstances. The volume of records or the need for redaction would be reasons to not meet the deadline.

It wasn't surprising it took longer than the 10 days.

Still, this started months ago – April for the latest request.

On June 1, City Clerk Suzie 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."

To date not a single record has been provided to *LTN*. In fact, Alessi has had zero communication with *LTN* since then regarding these records.

The California Department of Justice website says, "Californians have the right under the state Public Records Act and the California Constitution to access public information maintained by local and state government agencies, including the Department of Justice."

*Lake Tahoe News* is tired of being screwed with by this lousy public servant. Obviously she didn't like what was in the public records. After all, part of what we requested were her text messages. If she wanted to "talk" smack about people, she should have been doing it on her personal phone, not the city issued one. If she wanted to talk about her alcohol problem and not make it a public record, she should not have done so on her city issued phone.

You see, the records have been gathered. She even admitted to some being in her possession in her email to *LTV* last month. Others employed by the city have seen the documents. Alessi has joked about what's in some of them with city staff. How unprofessional.

It is the clerk – and only if she is elected, which this one is – and the city attorney who may redact information from a public record before it is given to the requesting party. Alessi wants more struck from public purview than the city attorney is comfortable with.

The public deserves to have access to public records. The public deserves to have a city clerk who works for the public. With this position being elected, the officeholder is only accountable to the public – not the city manager, not the city attorney, only the electorate.

Alessi is an abomination and a disgrace to South Lake Tahoe; as are those who continue to protect her.

This records request doesn't end with *Lake Tahoe News*. I'm letting the world know I'm requesting them as an individual. I already have another publication ready to publish them if they are produced after this month.