

Opinion: A call for disclosure by the League

By Rochelle Nason

The League to Save Lake Tahoe has filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, asking it to release public documents regarding the expenditure of public funds. The recipient of those funds, South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman/TRPA member Claire Fortier, says the League's FOIA request is an "attempt at bullying", and an "attempt to discredit me".

What is going on here?

On April 13, 2011, the TRPA disclosed that in 2010, it had paid \$9,681 to Fortier's company, Laren Inc. Wondering why TRPA would make payments to a political activist/researcher, the League reviewed copies of the economic disclosure forms that she had filed with TRPA to see if we could learn more.



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The payment from TRPA to Laren, and from Laren to Fortier did not appear on the form. We therefore wrote to Ms. Fortier and the agency, pointing out the omission and asking that she correct it before participating in any more of TRPA's meetings. On April 27, 2011, before participating in the TRPA's meeting on that date, Fortier indeed corrected her economic disclosure statement to show the payment to Laren.

The corrected statement declared, "Laren Communications completed a project for the TRPA on the history of the agency in Jan[uary]2010."

That same day a story ran in the *Tahoe Daily Tribune* in which it was reported that: "According to both Fortier and TRPA spokesman Jeff Cowen, the planning agency paid Fortier the \$9,681 for research on a 40th anniversary project. Fortier said the research revolved around the TRPA's pre-1980 history."

The League praised Fortier for the disclosure: "[t]he League is glad Claire has stepped up and done the right thing in disclosing her financial dealings with the TRPA. We are encouraging her to be proactive about contacting the Fair Political Practices Commission and making sure she has made all the disclosures required by state law as well."

We pointed out that: "We are still concerned with the question why TRPA would spend almost \$10,000 for historical research on its 40th anniversary. All that information has been assembled repeatedly in the past, in connection with the 30th, 25th, 20th, and 10th anniversaries of the agency." We noted would be seeking the documentation on the project – and that is why we filed our FOIA request.

Why does Claire Fortier consider a request that a government entity release public documents relating to its expenditure of public funds to be an act of "bullying" against her? She asks, "Is this a pissing match or an unabashed attempt by the League to intimidate me?"

Well, it is neither one. It is what it is: a request for public documents about a matter of the public interest.

We encourage everyone with an interest in all that is going on between the city and the League – or in the broader issues of land-use and environmental planning in the Lake Tahoe Basin – to spend a few minutes viewing my presentation to the City

Council on May 3, 2011.

You can find the presentation by moving the “slider” at the bottom of the video to 1:07.10 (1 hour, 7 minutes, 10 seconds into the meeting).

You will see that the League is *not* seeking to obstruct the economic development of the city of South Lake Tahoe when we try to assure that regional planning achieves environmental goals, nor when we seek to enforce the laws that protect Lake Tahoe. We *do* believe that by working together, we can keep Tahoe’s local communities sustainable – and that we can and we will Keep Tahoe Blue.

Rochelle Nason is the executive director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe, also known as Keep Tahoe Blue.