

LTCC, LTUSD boards close to deciding on future of elections

By Kathryn Reed

Big changes are in the works for how members are elected to the Lake Tahoe Community College and Lake Tahoe Unified School District boards.

To meet the 2002 California Voting Rights Act regulations, the two South Lake Tahoe districts may stop having at-large elections and instead have trustee elections. This means the five from each board would represent specific geographical areas.

The purpose of the state mandate is to ensure all ethnicities are represented and that minority groups have a realistic opportunity to be elected. Both education institutions did an analysis that determined at-large elections could open them up to a lawsuit.

What isn't known is what happens if no candidate comes forward for a specific trustee area.

On Jan. 8 the college board went over maps that had been created for LTUSD. While the two boards don't have to have the same trustee areas, officials believe it would be less confusing if they do. The college board picked alternative 3 as well as expressed a desire to look at a map that would not have one of the districts go from the state line to the western edge of the district's boundary.

To ensure consistency, lines are drawn with an eye toward where current board members live.

If alternative 3 were chosen for the college district, it

would mean Karen Borges and Fritz Wenck would be in the same area.

"I don't have a problem being in the same district as Karen because I may be coming to an end of my term," Wenck said. Wenck, with Roberta Mason, was elected in 1974 to the first college board.

Committees from both education systems have been meeting to figure out how best to move forward. On Wednesday they will meet to discuss going forward with even-year elections.

The LTUSD board is expected to vote on moving elections to even years on Jan. 22, and the LTCC board on Feb. 12. Some board terms would be extended by a year. This would mean instead of an election this year, the next one would be in 2014.

The change to even-year elections would give districts time to inform the public about the changes, save money by having sharing costs with more entities, and would likely draw more voters.

LTUSD board members in December agreed to go forward with trustee elections. The college board is expected to take action Jan. 22.