

Novasel: 'Economic vitality is the most important issue'



Sue Novasel

Publisher's note: *Lake Tahoe News asked the six El Dorado County supervisor candidates a series of questions. All are the same except for one that is specific to each candidate. The responses are being run in the order they were received by LTN. One candidate chose not to answer the questions.*

Name: Sue Novasel

Age: 58

Occupation: Business owner – Tahoe Dream Events (wedding and event planning), wedding and event coordinator

Education: High school – graduate of Salinas High School – Salinas; AA degree from Lake Tahoe Community College; bachelor degree – University of Nevada, Reno. Other certifications: A+ Certified (IT) and public notary.

What elected, civic, nonprofit boards or groups are or have you been affiliated with and in what capacity?: Current: 11 years – school board member (president in 2008; clerk for three years) – Lake Tahoe Unified School District; president – Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe; vice president – Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care; secretary – South Lake Tahoe

Wedding & Honeymoon Association; board member – Tahoe Chamber of Commerce; board member – Barton Foundation Community Advisory Committee.

Past: Chair – Meyers Community Roundtable Committee; member – Meyers Community Plan Team; member of the 56 Acre (Lakeview Commons) Community Advisory Committee and TRPA's Pathway 2007; president – Lake Tahoe Community College Foundation; president – South Tahoe Swim Team; president – Temple Bat Yam Board of Directors

Traffic is horrible on Fridays and Sundays throughout the county. Will you commit to not voting for any big subdivisions unless there is a plan to widen Highway 50? Why or why not?:

No. Traffic affected by “big subdivisions” is commuter traffic Monday through Friday, not weekend traffic. In fact, HOV lanes that have been built to address commuter traffic are to some extent a Friday afternoon benefit for South Lake Tahoe weekend traffic, as our tourism customers will generally have two or more persons in their car, and qualify to use them. On Sundays, the traffic flow on Highway 50 west of Placerville seems to move reasonably well.

Heavy traffic that generally occurs Fridays and Sundays is mainly through Placerville, from the Y to Meyers (especially during chain-up requirements and holidays), the Sierra-at-Tahoe intersection, and at the end of passing lanes in the American River Canyon. Those areas are not likely to be widened, but it is possible that the traffic could be alleviated by exploring operational changes. For example, stoplights in Placerville might be changed during the weekend so as to be timed with the direction traffic is flowing – east on Friday, west on Sunday. A designated chain-up lane and rest area in Meyers is a need that we addressed in the Meyers Community Plan that I hope will be accomplished in the future. This would allow travelers to move to the side of the road, creating better local access. Also, a traffic alert system (similar to those in large cities) installed throughout the

city of South Lake Tahoe, Meyers and along the West Slope could warn motorists of impending traffic jams, helping to mitigate the log-jam of cars waiting for hours during peak periods and after serious accidents.

As to approval or not of a subdivision proposal, the responsible thing to do is to look at each individual situation as opposed to a blanket yes or no position. For examples: Will the new development bring needed housing to El Dorado County? Will it increase our local government revenues without raising taxes? Will it attract large employers in clean industries that will provide more local jobs? Will it increase retail opportunities for residents? Each proposal should be studied for its overall impact to our county.

What is your position on a proposed November initiative to control growth?: Fundamentally, I oppose ballot box planning, as it is counterproductive to consensus-based setting of community direction. It is far better to work together identifying problems, goals, and objectives and work out a plan that solves as many of them as possible, as what we have done in Meyers.

It is my understanding that there are possibly four proposed November initiatives which affect the West Slope of our county. If the measures are approved by county voters, there is little doubt that protracted litigation will ensue. If the last two decades of El Dorado County history are any guide, it will take many years to resolve and at considerable county legal expense. The county doesn't have millions of dollars for court fights. The Board of Supervisors is the agency tasked with developing, adopting and implementing the General Plan. That's one of their most important jobs, and I look forward to working with all stakeholders in guiding the future of the county. TRPA will still govern virtually all planning matters within the Tahoe Basin, with opportunities that the District V supervisor can directly affect since the county has a seat on TRPA's Governing Board.

What are your thoughts of making Lake Tahoe its own county?:

It is not economically or politically feasible. The concept was briefly studied around 1980. At that time, it was seen as marginally feasible, based on the El Dorado County portion of Lake Tahoe being a city-county, and getting unique city-county revenues, like San Francisco. In the years since, more Proposition 13 type statewide initiatives, plus diminished population, have made the economic prospects worse. Politically, it would have to be approved by majorities both here and on the West Slope, which I consider unlikely.

What entities would you not take money from?: I will not accept campaign contributions from any organization or business whose integrity is questionable, or anyone whose activities bring harm to District V or our quality of life, or threaten the safety and well-being of our children, neighborhoods, schools, or businesses. I expect to receive support from a wide variety of individuals and entities. Anyone providing financial support must understand that supporting my candidacy does not mean having the expectation of getting my vote on an issue.

What would you do to boost the economy?: The environmental restoration incentives developed by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency in its new Regional Plan must be encouraged and made to work. We should improve our recreational business relationships with West Slope recreation providers. The City-County Recreation Master Plan currently in the planning process must also be implemented, but would need voter approval to do so. We should continue support for the El Dorado County and Tahoe chambers of commerce. The newly organized El Dorado County Community Development Agency must be successful in removing barriers and facilitating business formation and expansion.

What is the No. 1 issue facing District 5 and how do you propose to resolve it?: Economic vitality is the most important issue. TRPA's new Regional Plan update includes

incentives and processes that can spur businesses to redevelop run-down properties or add new businesses to our communities while improving our environment. In addition, a huge issue in all of District V is the fire risk resulting from poor forest health. We must be sure we are organized for rapid response by CalFire, the U.S. Forest Service, and local fire agencies so that effective coordinated action by all can occur the instant a fire starts. Effective early action is critical to minimize the damage that occurs. Fire agencies did significant reorganization as a result of the Angora Fire. In addition, many regulatory obstacles to improved forest health and defensible space were removed or reduced as a result of the Angora Fire. We must be sure they stay that way.

Supervisors meet only once a year in Lake Tahoe. Do you believe this is fair representation? Why or why not?: I am convinced that once per year is all that is feasible, as the board also has to meet once per year in the other four districts (except for District III, where the county office is located). In addition, much of the county board business requires work with employees and should be conducted where the county's main offices are located for feasibility.

Having said that, the duty of the District V supervisor is to be sure the maximum benefit for fair representation is achieved when a meeting is held in other districts. For our district, that includes joint meetings with the City Council where the city and county both present their major issues and discuss items where joint effort is needed. They should also take tours of city and county projects and major issue areas. Meeting with representatives of Tahoe basin agencies such as the school and utility districts, Tahoe Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service, and Lake Valley Fire District, their achievements, issues, and challenges can be understood by the entire Board of Supervisors.

Would you have voted for Red Hawk to be built and to divert Caltrans funds for interchanges? Those decisions are still

negatively impacting the South Shore. Is there anything you would do to change the status quo?: To clarify, the Board of Supervisors never voted “for” Red Hawk, they voted to end the litigation that continued to obstruct it. By that point, state legislation and voter approved initiatives had created a situation where the construction of Red Hawk could not ultimately be stopped. In exchange for no longer obstructing it, the county received annual revenues to offset the facility’s impact upon county services. If by “status quo”, you mean the distribution and uses of funds that the county receives, then, yes, I believe there is a need to evaluate the extent to which District 5 benefits from those funds and whether District V is receiving benefits that were intended and/or promised under the agreements.

Would you support having more tax dollars from the county coming to the South Shore? Currently, more dollars leave the basin than come back.: I want to be sure that District V is getting its fair share and will fight to be sure it happens. However, I don’t know of any study or analysis showing that more dollars leave the basin than come back, and have doubts that this is correct. For example, the basin, with about 20 percent of the county population, has its own set of secondary offices for more general fund departments than any other district, plus is the only district having its own juvenile hall and jail facilities. Those facilities are located in the basin because they are needed so that basin residents have equal access to county services.

To address getting the facts on this issue, my first step would be to appoint a committee of knowledgeable local citizen volunteers to do a study of the county portion of taxes collected and compare them with the costs of the general fund services they fund.

The county and the city of South Lake Tahoe have a long history of not getting along. How would you propose to improve the relationship?: The two principal facets of the

relationship are (1) staff to staff and (2) board to City Council. To improve staff relationships, I would have the principal counterpart positions – county chief administrative officer and city manager, county counsel and city attorney – meet after I have facilitated development of a discussion agenda, then meet on a regular basis thereafter.

To improve the elected officials relationship, I would meet periodically with the mayor, and with the mayor's knowledge and approval, other members of the City Council.

These meetings would be in addition to being sure that my office did a very good job of setting up the annual "Board meets in South Lake Tahoe" meeting, as discussed previously. This would include setting joint meetings between City Council and county supervisors, taking tours of city and county projects with emphasis on major project areas, and meeting with representatives of other Tahoe basin agencies such as the TRPA, Tahoe Conservancy, Tahoe chambers, U.S. Forest Service and Lake Valley Fire District.

What is your vision for Meyers and how will you make it a reality?: I have lived in Meyers (Christmas Valley) for over 30 years. As a member of the original Meyers Community Plan team, I helped develop a plan for the future of Meyers. After nearly four years of work on the plan, we succeeded in having the power lines lining Highway 50 buried, thereby improving the scenic corridor of the area. We worked on other ideas to improve the corridor that included: adding a chain-up/rest area to help relieve Sunday congestion; creating a new "Welcome to Meyers" sign to give travelers a sense of arrival; using an incentive program to create new town centers; and adding design elements to give our community a rustic, alpine appearance.

The new Meyers plan is similar to our original plan. But there is still work to be done on the plan – there are differences that need to be discussed and either approved by our community

or changed. Meetings need to include all stakeholders and be properly noticed so that the Meyers community can have a proper voice in planning the future of their community. The most important part of planning is implementation. I will make sure that the new Meyers Area Plan, along with all community plans throughout District V, have the ability to be implemented properly by having county staff available and willing to help our residents create the vision that they see for their communities.

Why should someone vote for you over someone else?: My varied experiences and over 35 years as a basin resident have given me a broad-ranging set of connections with community residents, and broad-ranging understanding of community issues. They have taught me that good decisions result from reaching out to get information from those affected; listening carefully more than talking; seeking win-win outcomes; and achieving the greatest good for those I represent. I will increase citizen involvement in decisions by increasing local community meetings and improving communication throughout all portions of District V. I have a demonstrated strong work ethic and the high energy demanded of a county supervisor. If elected, I will be your full time supervisor, fighting to be sure District V receives its fair share of county benefits based on the needs of its citizens, not proportionate finances.

You have been absent more than any Lake Tahoe Unified School District board member and that board meets once or twice a month. How can the public believe you will show up every day as a county supervisor?: In 2013, I missed three out of 20 meetings, while two other board members missed two, another one, and the other none. Already scheduled to miss one meeting while being out of town for two weeks, another special meeting was called when the district staff realized that actions to ensure the construction season staying on schedule had not been agendaized for the meeting I was at. A poll of board

members was taken, and while only three members could attend the special meeting, it was enough for a quorum – thereby causing me to miss two meetings. The other meeting I missed in 2013 was when I had the flu. I am a hard worker and have a serious work ethic. As county supervisor, I pledge to attend as many meetings as possible.

What do you do for fun?: I ski, hike, swim, mountain bike, kayak, golf and try to stay fit by going to the gym as much as possible. As a family, we travel and go to the beach on a warm summer afternoons. I also get a great deal of enjoyment out of giving back to our community by volunteering, especially at Lake Tahoe Wildlife Center where I help care for injured and orphaned wild animals and birds.

Tell us something about yourself that people might not know: Many people don't know that I was an Olympic torch runner when it came through town in 1984 (on its way to the Summer Games in Los Angeles). I was the student representative to Lake Tahoe Community College's board of trustees at the time and they asked me to represent the college by running the torch for the school. It was such a great honor that I decided to donate the torch back to the college and it still resides in their gym today.