

Conner: Wants to be voice for average citizen

Publisher's note: Lake Tahoe News asked candidates for South Lake Tahoe City Council, Lake Tahoe Community College, Lake Tahoe Unified School District, Douglas County School District, South Tahoe Public Utility District and Lake Valley Fire Protection District a series of questions. We are running the responses in the order received. All profiles may be found under the Special Projects listing and then the 2106 November Candidate Profiles category.



JoAnn Conner is running for one of two seats open on the South Lake Tahoe City Council.

Name: JoAnn Conner

Age: 67

Job/profession: Small business owner

What boards, commissions, or other experience, including volunteering, do you have?: Currently serve as City Council representative to the League of California Cities, City

Council representative to the lodging association, council subcommittee representative for the Senior Center and the Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless. Served on Airport Master Plan Committee, Recreation JPA, Solid Waste JPA, served on the fields subcommittee from the City Council, represented the City Council on the Bicycle Coalition. Currently serve on the board of directors for the South Lake Tahoe Cancer League, regularly attend the Tahoe Area Coordinating Council for the Disabled, am a member of the American Legion Auxiliary, member of the Tahoe Art League, member of Friends of the Library, a lifetime member of the Lake Tahoe Historical Society, past president of the South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce, past board member of Tahoe Douglas Rotary, past Neighborhood Chairperson for Girl Scouts, past co-pack master of Boy Scout Pack 594. I have done fundraisers for the Lake Tahoe Humane Society, American Legion, VFW, and Christmas Cheer, and regularly help with the beach clean up on the 5th of July organized by the League to Save Lake Tahoe.

Why are you seeking re-election?: There are a lot of projects to complete and work to be done in our community; I have met with many community members and organizations that have initiated good beginnings for our town. Many citizens asked me to run again as they feel there needs to be at least one voice that speaks for the average citizen and business owner. Many are supporting me in this race.

Why should voters vote for you over another candidate?: I have four years of diverse experience and a real understanding of the personalities involved in running the city. I would like to see the city revamp their fees and permit structure to benefit small businesses and simplify processes to encourage good growth and improvements.

What distinct experience or competency makes you uniquely qualified to lead effectively as an elected official?: I listen to the average citizen and business owner, as well as larger entities. I connect with the average citizen and

respond to their needs. As a small business owner, I understand those concerns.

Public agencies have been under scrutiny the last few years for lack of transparency and accountability. What will you do to ensure both?: I will continue to speak up for greater transparency and citizen voices to be heard.

What stands out for you in the current budget that you support and that you would change?: Not enough money allocated for roads. There are several areas where I would like to see the taxpayer money spent with more care and accountability.

Do you support current legislation for \$15 minimum wage? Please explain: No, across the board mandates do not work. The biggest employers in our town and nation are small business owners. Requiring a small business owner to adhere to the same standards as multi-million dollar companies is not logical. If you force them to pay more when they cannot afford it, they will lay off workers or drop benefits. For example, an unintended consequence of mandatory health insurance resulted in a number of small businesses in our town dropping the health coverage they had previously given to their employees because the mandate created higher premiums for these businesses. They increased the wages, in many cases, but it still was not sufficient to allow the employee to buy insurance on their own. How did that help? It would be interesting to explore incentives for the bigger businesses to provide housing and better wages. Bear in mind, many of the employees in our community who do not work for small business work for a government entity. That means the taxpayers fund the raise. Typically, when a mandate of this nature is issued, the prices for rent, food, goods, and services also go up, so that is not the answer to help people financially. We need to work on better wages in our community, but this is not the solution.

Do you support Proposition 55? Please explain: Our schools

continue to need funding, and that is important. The sales tax portion is due to expire, so on the surface, it looks like those who make more will pay more. The battle may come in the form of people wanting their government to be more fiscally conservative instead of spending more. The issue of health care for lower income may also be muddled by the implementation of Obamacare.

Describe three attributes for a successful council: A willingness to work for the people, being willing to set personal differences aside and honor all views, dedication of time for all council members to share the responsibilities of council, without a concentration of power.

What are your thoughts about public employee defined benefits?: This is a growing concern, as the system itself may be beginning to erode as far as stability. Public employees pay into this system, as do their employers. Many times this is a trade off in lieu of raises, just as it is in the private sector. However, since it does not appear to be sustainable in the long run, looking at options now would seem wise.

Please explain your position on contracting out work normally done by staff: That depends on the work and the staff available and qualified to do the work. If we don't have enough or qualified staff, it is necessary. Sometimes impartiality plays a role, and it is in the best interest of the citizens to use an independent firm.

What is your 10-year vision for the council?: I would like to see term limits on council service. The vision is too limited and the possibility to shut out new ideas is more likely when people have served more than two terms. Likewise, the mayor position should be rotated to allow for more diversity. Protocols should be adjusted to prohibit the concentration of power we currently have. The appearance is one or two council members are making major decisions for the majority of the council and the people. That is not healthy.

What as an elected official are the three things you are most proud of during your tenure?: Building, maintaining, and voting to keep the bike paths clear all year for our citizens who do not drive. Working with the Recreation JPA and surrounding entities to rebuild the fields at Al Tahoe School (adding one there as well) and Sierra House School, starting the new field at the LTCC site. Helping to complete the Harrison Avenue project.

Which votes would you change and why?: Paid Parking. The people did not want it.

Being on the council means working as a team. How will you work with the next council for the greater good of the community?: "Greater good of the community" should be defined by the majority of the citizens, and then the council should work for what the people want. The "power" on the council should be distributed more evenly to maximize the contributions and talents of all.

What should be the three main priorities for the council?: Maintain the roads; be the catalyst for affordable and workforce housing; be fiscally responsible while addressing the three main points for forming the city: police, fire, snow removal.

What role should government have in housing for residents?: A healthy town has a diverse workforce and housing is a huge issue. I believe there is some state money we could pursue for housing for veterans. We could offer incentives by decreasing fees for businesses that will add housing to their building projects. I believe we should open serious dialogue with the larger employers in the region and work to have them provide better employee housing. In other areas, they do this successfully.

How can the city partner with the school district to improve high school graduation rates?: We could look at an apprentice

type program to help students try out different jobs and careers. Not all students will excel at academics, some are gifted in arts, mechanics, recreation. My experience teaching at-risk students showed that you will not keep them if they are frustrated or feel what they are required to learn is irrelevant to their life. We have a variety of jobs and could offer sampling of work situations.

How can local government support and expand job creation and small local businesses?: Stop over regulating and decrease fees. The sign fee was a perfect example. The sign makers could do in two or three hours what it took city staff 10 or 12 hours to do because the city added more steps and repetition to reach the same end. Involve the business owners more to actually develop the most efficient program and policy, which would be better for business and save employee time.

If you believe in the one South Shore concept, what would you do to further make this a reality? If you don't believe in blurring the state line, why don't you?: The one South Shore idea is great in theory, but too often, that has equated to the citizens and businesses in South Lake Tahoe and Meyers bearing more of the negative impact than the Stateline area. The conversation and planning needs to be fair and the "anti-Nevada" labels need to stop.

What are your views on:

a: Vacation home rentals: Both sides of this issue are growing more agitated and want firm guidelines. I propose a moratorium on mega houses in residential neighborhoods. The danger in not taking this step is that the residents may very well push for residential zoning laws to be enforced, which would devastate the VHR community. There has to be a strong compromise in the near future.

b: Loop road: It is still full of uncertainty and unanswered

questions. Would you start to build a house without a full set of plans? It does not appear to be fully thought out, for example, where is the funding for the affordable housing? That is a huge issue. It is also unfortunate that in the effort to get the area declared urban instead of rural, the funding for bus service to Carson City has been jeopardized.

c: City streets: The city needs to direct more of the budget to the repair and maintenance of our roads before they require the much more expensive mandate of complete replacement.

d: Relationships with other public agencies: Often, it is an adversarial relationship aggravated by one of the agencies attempting power over another. Perfect example was the issue with STPUD. More communication would likely have been more effective. Everything isn't about who can gain the most money, it is about serving the people in the best manner possible.

e. TRPA defined commodities: In my opinion, this needs to be dissolved.

f. Transient occupancy tax measure: It seems like it would help fund a better recreation complex, at the expense of the visitors. I am concerned about securing the funding to build the center. If this passes, it could bring millions to the city to fund a new complex, but our debt ratio is already high.

g. Sales tax measure: If the people wish to pay a little more, it could be designated to fix the roads or help secure more workforce housing.

h. Where do you want the additional sales tax money to go to?: Where the citizens want it to go. I suspect that will be roads and/or affordable housing, but they need to decide, not the council.

Tell us something about yourself that people may not know: My "mind matters" too.

You brought a lawsuit against your four colleagues and one of two employees you manage which cost the taxpayers about \$100,000, how do defend these actions? What did you get out of this action that you didn't have before the lawsuit?: I was not present to vote on that expenditure. The agreement answers the rest of the questions.