

SLT mayor highlights staff accomplishments



Mayor Austin Sass on Nov. 21 talks to department heads during a break. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

It was a bit of a grade-school level civics lesson for those who sat through the South Lake Tahoe mayor's address on Tuesday.

It was not about laying a path for the future. It wasn't about what the council has done in his one year holding the gavel. It wasn't about how the electeds' policy decisions have come to fruition – good or bad; or lessons learned; or any vision.

Then again, Austin Sass on Nov. 21 said his address was not going to be like others. "It's not really a state of the city." And his talk lived up to that introduction.

Normally, the mayor takes the opportunity of his or her last full council meeting to tout what has happened in the last year, with a bit of a nod to what lies ahead. Sass altered that tradition.

Another noticeable difference was the room was not packed as it has been in years past for the annual mayor's address.

Instead, Sass launched into how the most important part of the city is the nearly 200 employees. But in an odd twist he did not speak of the accomplishments of the city manager or city attorney. Those are the only two employees the City Council has any say over. The council hires and fires, disciplines, and give raises to those two employees.

And those two had to have had accomplishments in order for Sass to bestow praise on the department heads.

Two other workers not mentioned were the city clerk and treasurer, and the latter was in the audience. Maybe it's because they are both elected officials and Sass doesn't see them as integral to the operation of the city.

Sass' address was more like that of a boss praising his employees, but these individuals are not his employees.

There is not a single employee the council has any control over other than the city manager and city attorney. In fact, the protocol in City Code is that council members are not allowed to give direction directly to staff outside the city manager or city attorney.

During his talk, Sass walked around to where each department head was sitting. He patted most on the shoulder as he stood over them. He introduced them and then he listed their accomplishments.

Some accomplishments of the city department include:

- Growing the city's social media presence;

- Champions Plaza;
- Responding to more than 3,200 fire incidents in 2017;
- Increased training for firefighters;
- 24,097 airport operations; the highest it's been since 1992;
- 395 arrests by police officers this year;
- 8,029 miles of roads plowed;
- 1,153 potholes filled;
- Community ball fields built;
- Debt refinancing saves \$1 million annually;
- 1,372 building permits issued;
- 7,000 special events in the city;
- 6,400 rounds of golf at Bijou.

At the end of the speech, the audience was left with how much work the various departments do but no sense of what the council does. Sass seemed to paint a picture for how effective and efficient a city manager led government works, what great leaders there are among staff, while reducing the role of the electeds to essentially being figure heads.

At the Dec. 12 council meeting the five electeds will choose among themselves who will be the next mayor and mayor pro tem.