

Citizens vent frustrations at CAB board meeting

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About 100 citizens packed the Incline Village General Improvement District board room Wednesday night with numerous questions for Washoe County Assessor Josh Wilson.

Two hours later, most left the Citizen Advisory Board meeting still searching for answers.

With the standing room only crowd lining both sides of the room and overflowing into the hallway and out the front doors, citizens strained to listen as Wilson explained his role in assessing taxation values for the 2008-2009 fiscal year.

"I'm not trying to hide anything; I want the answers just like you," Wilson told the crowd. "I have to assess the values they way they are, despite the court cases."

Wilson, along with Senior Assessor Rigo Lopez, were scheduled to make a presentation on the upcoming fiscal year (2008-2009) reappraisal of property toward the end of Wednesday's meeting.

However, once the meeting was called to order, the board voted to move Wilson's presentation to take place directly after the public comment portion.

"We've never had a turnout quite like this," said Rick Jones, CAB board member.

But since Wilson and Lopez were late arriving to the meeting, it began with Capt. Steve Kelly, commander of the Washoe County Sheriff's Office Incline Village Substation, giving a presentation about local DUI rates.

As Kelly finished, Wilson and Lopez arrived and were met with silent stares as they made their way through the crowd to the front of the room.

After Wilson's brief presentation, in which he stated a few times, that as an assessor, he has no power to change rates or reduce them in any way,^{!!} the board allowed community members to ask questions. Board chair Gene Brockman gave citizens two minutes for questions, and Wilson was allowed to respond.

Most citizens grilled Wilson on why he still was assessing new rates, despite a Nevada Supreme Court decision last week that upheld previous rulings, again saying all 9,000 members of the Incline Village/Crystal Bay community were illegally taxed.

Maryanne Ingemanson, president of the Village League, said in a Wednesday Bonanza story that the ruling gave Washoe County 20 days, retroactive to July 26, to appeal the decision.

"To be honest, (the July 26 ruling) caught me by complete surprise when I found out about it Tuesday," Wilson said at the meeting. "I didn't even know it was in court."

Many citizens used their two minutes to vent frustration at the situation and to ask Wilson why tax rates for the upcoming fiscal year aren't being rolled back to the 2002-2003 rate.

Wilson's answer to most comments, which he repeated numerous times, is that he has no power over changing rates.

"I can't change (assessment) rates because every value from 2002 until now is still tied up in judicial review," Wilson said. "I don't know how many times I have to say it. I can't change those values. I don't have the power."

Disgusted scoffs and sarcastic laughter, along with phrases, such as "a slush fund for Incline

Village," and "if you don't know, then why are you here," rang out from the audience throughout the question/answer session

Les Barta, Incline resident and member of the Village League, was one of the 26 citizens who got the opportunity to speak to Wilson.

"Everything you've said is either twisted or wrong; these values are unconstitutional, that's the fact," Barta said. "Why don't you just follow the regulations? I suggest strongly that you get some help so you can do it right."

Another issue brought up was that some citizens already were receiving tax benefits this year because they won appeals they filed before the Jan. 15, 2007 deadline.

Some citizens asked what the remaining 8,000 IV/CB residents who missed the deadline are supposed to do while their neighbors reap in tax reductions, even though the Aug. 26 ruling said all 9,000 residents were wrongly taxed.

"My neighbors are paying less than me in taxes," said Elliott Weinstein, who lives at 120 Highway 28 in Crystal Bay. "What's the remedy for that?"

Wilson said the remedy doesn't lie with him; it lies with the county and state board of Equalization.

"I work for the taxpayers; I'm focused on moving forward. It's my job to assess taxes, so I have to do it the right way until things change," Wilson said. "Nobody can say what the new values are going to be; that's up to the Supreme Court."

Ward Williams, who lives at 930 Tahoe Blvd. in Incline Village, was one of the last citizens to comment Wednesday night.

"Are you in firm belief that what has happened in the past and currently are improper?" Williams asked Wilson. "That as an assessor, that you thought any of it was wrong?"

"In my opinion, I never saw any evidence to the (County Board of Equalization) that showed that," Wilson said.

Wilson closed the discussion with a statement.

"I'm not a bad person. I took this job to protect..." he said. "I took this job to do what was right. I want to do the right thing."

Brockman called the question/answer session to an end at about 9:15 p.m.

After a three-minute recess, only two of the approximately 100 residents remained for the rest of the meeting.

Greg McKay, assistant chief with the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District (NLTFPD), gave a presentation about the proposed Round 8 Capital and Science Projects that may affect Washoe County and Incline Village/Crystal Bay.

Sarah Tone, a Washoe County Community Outreach coordinators, presented information on Washoe County's new community-initiated funding program "Develop, Revitalize, Invest, Enrich" (DRIVE).

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