

Agency head alleges commissioner violated privacy, public meeting laws

Clay Duda

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SHASTA COUNTY, California - The head of a Shasta County agency is alleging one of the organization's commissioners violated state privacy and public meeting laws by making comments about her to media outlets in February.

A Feb. 25 letter written by an attorney on behalf of Jan Lopez, executive director of the Shasta Local Area Formation Commission, says Commissioner Les Baugh disclosed confidential personnel information and possibly violated the California Ralph M. Brown Act during conversations with reporters after a closed session meeting on Jan. 29.

"The willful disclosure of information regarding Ms. Lopez was made to at least two media outlets, and consisted of confidential personnel and evaluation information which was only discussed by the Commission during closed session on January 29, 2015," the letter from Los Angeles-based attorney Cynthia Hackler reads. "The disclosure of this information is directly related to Ms. Lopez's ongoing evaluation process, and has subjected Ms. Lopez to unnecessary professional embarrassment."

The notice came just days after a Record Searchlight article in late February detailing questionable charges Lopez had made on a Shasta LAFCO-issued debit card totaling \$3,150 for local hotel stays. In her employment contract Lopez agreed to pay out of pocket for all travel and lodging expenses within Shasta County.

"All I know is who spoke about it in the newspaper," Lopez said Wednesday. "At least one of the people who spoke about it to the press was in the (Jan. 29 closed-session) meeting."

In that report Baugh and fellow Commissioner Brenda Haynes were quoted answering questions related to Shasta LAFCO financial documents obtained by the Record Searchlight under the California Public Records Act. Baugh declined to comment for this story. Haynes did not immediately return calls Wednesday afternoon.

UPDATE: Haynes did not attend the Jan. 29 closed session meeting, but was in attendance of a LAFCO fiscal committee meeting earlier that day, according to Lopez.

"As a member of that committee (she) was and is quite able to discuss what the Committee reviewed at that time," Lopez said in an e-mail on Thursday.

Questions over Shasta LAFCO expenses led Baugh to resign his post on the organization’s fiscal committee in February, while other commissioners — including Haynes — have come to Lopez’s defense.

“I know there are some hotel and restaurant charges, but given the long days and extreme pressure Jan Lopez was under to get LAFCO back on track I’m not concerned with any of those charges,” Haynes said at the time.

Lopez was hired in October 2013 on a 15-month, \$80,000 contract and tasked with clearing a huge backlog of 51 overdue sphere-of-influence updates and municipal service reviews by the end of 2014 to comply with a lawsuit. On average, LAFCO handles less than a dozen such studies annually.

All but one of those overdue studies was completed by the lawsuit’s deadline.

Lopez’s contract expired in January, but was extended by Shasta LAFCO commissioners through March. The board will renew contract discussions during its April 2 meeting, 9 a.m. in the Anderson City Council chambers at 1887 Howard St. in Anderson.