

Political connections to Reno casino project jeopardize development

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Questions are brewing on the Reno City Council over a potential development in the North Valleys and whether some council members' relationship to the developer could restrict their ability to vote on the project under the state's ethics laws.

At the center is Carlos Vasquez, a developer whose nascent project is planned for a sagebrush-filled parcel just north of the Walmart under construction off Sky Vista Parkway. Included in the proposal is a potential change to the city's master plan to allow nonrestricted gaming and a potential casino, something that would ultimately require City Council approval.

The questions are emerging in light of the recent ethics controversy in Sparks that featured Vasquez and his longtime friendship with and past campaign work for Sparks Councilman Mike Carrigan and his 2006 vote to allow the Lazy 8 casino, which Vasquez represented. That project was planned for an area off of Pyramid Highway and would have featured a ranch-themed casino and hotel, though the project was never built.

As for Vasquez's next proposal, some Reno council members aren't sure if their past relationship to Vasquez would prevent them from voting on it. For example, Vasquez did \$24,328.21 in campaign work for Councilwoman Jessica Sferrazza in 2004 and 2008 and performed \$40,130 worth of television advertising and related work for Councilman Dave Aiazzi in 2008. Both have asked the city attorney's office for advice on the matter, with no conclusion yet.

Vasquez's business partner, Chris Barrett, was paid \$146.36 while working on Mayor Bob Cashell's 2002 campaign and remains a longtime personal friend of Cashell. Councilman Dwight Dortch also paid Vasquez, who owned a printing company, \$4,023 in 2002 for some campaign literature.

Last month, Sferrazza asked for an ethics opinion from the Reno City Attorney's office regarding her relationship to Vasquez.

"I won't be involved until I get that opinion back," she said.



Reno City Hall / City of Reno

The story so far

The first phase of a development in Reno's North Valleys community features a Walmart under

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While he's waiting on that opinion from the city attorney on how to proceed, Aiazzi said his connection to Vasquez was merely business. Dortch said he wasn't concerned about his connection to Vasquez, either, calling those campaign fliers a one-time business transaction that happened nearly a decade ago.

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