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Washoe County Commissioner Kitty Jung this week cited tensions between the Commission and the Reno City Council.

Commissioner Jung warns of 'arms race' with city of Reno

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NEVADA NEWSMAKERS

Washoe County Commissioner Kitty Jung this week called the relationship between the Commission and the Reno City Council "an arms race," saying growth, regional planning and annexation are factors that plague the relationship.

Jung also said on Nevada Newsmakers that more cooperation is needed for infrastructure repairs.

"We all should all be working together on the infrastructure that is necessary for the future," Jung said, including the City of Sparks.

She said the current efforts are "siloe'd," in the local governments, meaning efforts are not shared.

"And having this arms race of needing development to pay for fire (protection), needing to annex that (county land) to take the property tax. It is an arms race and if that not solved, it is very difficult for us to be regional partners," Jung said.

Jung was especially critical of the City of Reno annexing land from the county.

"When they annex into the county, we lose the tax base for the fire (protection) we provide," she said. "And we have a dedicated fund for that (firefighter and fire fighting). It is not a general-fund based operation. Every time they annex, we then lose that and I could argue, they don't build another fire station."

When host Sam Shad noted the city could say it does not have the money to a new fire station, Jung shot back: "Then don't annex."

Jung proposed Reno Mayor Hillary Schieve and Commission Chairman Bob Lucey should meet to resolve differences.

Jung called Schieve "open minded, practical and reasonable."

Jung said Lucey should be the representative of the county because he has missed the most contentious times between the Washoe Commission and Reno Council since he was just elected in 2014.

"He did not go through the fire divorce or the de-consolidation but they (current city council) didn't either. But staff did," Jung said.

The commission and council battled for almost four years -- from 2012 to 2016 -- over the acrimonious deconsolidation of the community's two largest fire agencies, one from the City of Reno and the other from Washoe County. Jung was there for all of it, having been first appointed to the commission in 2007 by then-Gov. Jim Gibbons.

Jung also said Washoe commissioners must also address problems of regional growth with commissioners from other counties.

Yet she said she understood the reluctance of neighboring counties to act as "bedroom communities" for the urban area of Washoe County.

Despite a critical need for housing in Northern Nevada, Jung said: "I also understand why people don't want housing," she said. "A bedroom community is not a sustainable community because they (families) have so many services that they demand and it really doesn't work out.

"A commercial county that is all commercial is the richest county because they don't call the fire department," Jung said.

"They don't call the police. They don't have kids in school, right? So I get that isolationist role."

Jung said the county is also working on easing the housing crisis within Washoe. Home and apartment construction has not kept up with demand, as the Reno area is becoming a tech hub and jobs magnet with the recent arrivals of major corporations such as Switch, Google, Tesla and others.

"Fifth-five percent of our citizens here in Washoe County can't afford the median housing price, that's more than half," she said. "And this is projected to not get better, but worse if we do not take some sort of action as a region."

Affordable housing is critical for the future development of the region, Jung said.

"I really believe that this should live with regional planning and the housing authorities to figure out a bank of some sort that developers pay into and then we can turn around and subsidize developers to then build affordable housing," she said.

"That to me is the clearest path. But I'm sure there are lots of other ideas. I did ask (county) staff to come back with some ideas across the country, the best practices, because we are not the only community that has had this sort of explosion of growth and prices."