

Harrison Avenue upgrades on target for summer '13

By Kathryn Reed

A year from now motorists should know which way to drive on Harrison Avenue and how to park. This is because the multimillion dollar project that was first talked about in 1995 is expected to go out to bid in the fall, with construction beginning in May 2013.

This small stretch of roadway in South Lake Tahoe in many ways is like a frontage street. Parking and pedestrian access have long been issues. And they were exacerbated last summer when Caltrans put in curb and gutters along Highway 50 that cut into the city street.

With more than 70 percent of the property owners ready to form an assessment district, city officials on Tuesday agreed to finish the planning. By the time the project is done, the intent is to have transformed this area into a destination, to an even greater extent than what occurred with the improvements along Ski Run Boulevard.



What streets in the Harrison Avenue area could look like.
Rendering/Design Workshop

It will also serve as an extension to Lakeview Commons.

“It will really beautify the whole area and make that the center of town,” Councilman Tom Davis said.

Some businesses are talking about upgrading their properties at the same time the city does its work so things are torn up once and even more visual improvements are made.

While it is a road project, that isn't all it is. Besides increasing circulation to the entire area – not just Harrison Avenue, it will improve safety, deal with erosion concerns – so it is a water quality project, aesthetically upgrade this location, and ideally help attract new and retain current businesses.

Coleen Shade, planner with RO Anderson in South Lake Tahoe, explained to the council how some of the streets in the area are going to be one-way and in some cases one lane, diagonal parking will increase the number of spots, paving stones will be used for the sidewalks, crosswalks will be colored concrete, a multi-use Class 1 bike path will go along Riverside Avenue, light standards similar to Ski Run will be erected, and a gateway sign at the boat ramp end will be installed.

It's possible some of the old retaining wall that was disassembled at Echo Summit last year could be turned into seating walls in this hub. Some of those stones have been incorporated into Lakeview Commons.

While all the improvements are on public property except for a few easements, property owners are paying for some of the upgrades. Their total share is nearly \$800,000, which is divided among them based on a formula they agreed to.

One way this area is different than Ski Run is that the property owners are assessed the fee, not the businesses.

Mike McKeen, who owns the Pinnacle Real Estate building, and Duncan Sennott, who owns Sno-Flake Drive-In, attended the July 17 meeting. They both praised the city for its efforts and are looking forward to the changes coming to their neighborhood.

While the funding is in place for the remainder of the planning, the construction dollars are not all secured, though the city knows where it would like the \$3,394,170 to come from. Besides the property owners paying \$792,235, the COP bond will kick in \$1.5 million, the CTC has verbally said \$500,000 is available from the stormwater quality funds – but the board has not voted on this, and the CTC is being engaged regarding funds for the bike trail. If that doesn't come through, the city wants to use Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality improvement (CMAQ) dollars from 2014-15. This would require the project taking two years.

Hilary Roverud, director of Development Services, said the two properties that have not signed on are the Pine Lodge behind Sno-Flake and Pichetti Winery. She said the former supports the project, but is financially unable to participate. The latter, Roverud said, is concerned with San Jose Avenue becoming one-way headed east it will be difficult for people to access the tasting room. But Roverud said it's possible a driveway could be created off Harrison Avenue.

Parking is a concern of Councilman Hal Cole's.

"You can't force people out of cars by eliminating parking," he said.

While the project will add more than 80 spaces to what exists today, Cole and others worry that may not be enough, especially based on the popularity of Lakeview Commons.

Twenty-six spots will disappear from Harrison Avenue, while that same number is added to San Jose Avenue. This is largely done by having people park diagonally instead of parallel.

The city now owns the lot at Harrison and Modesto avenues next to the *Tahoe Daily Tribune*. That land will be parking.

More slots are also expected to be added to the triangular shaped lot where boat trailers go. El Dorado County and the California Tahoe Conservancy are being consulted about that.