

Private property owner threatens completion of Sawmill bike path

By Kathryn Reed

Sawmill bike path may never be completed.

“They make some offers and some threats, but I’m not interested in them,” Cass Amacker told *Lake Tahoe News*. “They don’t want to pay me nothing for buildable property.”

Amacker for years has owned a 20-acre parcel off Sawmill Road.



Sawmill bike path goes for seven-tenths of a mile before needing to get on the road. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Part of his property is being sought by El Dorado County so the remaining nearly 1.3 miles of trail can be constructed. Earlier this summer about seven-tenths of a mile was put in which had nothing to do with the Amacker property.

It’s a curvy trail that meanders just off Sawmill, almost into a wooded area. It meets all the current bike requirements of being 10-foot wide, with 2-foot shoulders. But it abruptly stops with a big white fence and yellow sign that says “End”.

County officials don't want it to end there. The whole idea of the Sawmill path is to have it link up with the bridge on Highway 50 that crosses the Upper Truckee River before the path takes cyclists and walkers to Meyers.

Brendan Ferry, senior planner with El Dorado County, remains optimistic a resolution with Amacker and the other private property owner along that stretch of roadway will be found so that section of bike trail can be finished next summer.

But those agreements will need to be in hand by the end of the year in order to request the Congestion Mitigation and Air Management funds from Caltrans, and have the Board of Supervisors approve a bid package and then award the contract to a company. Plus, with the next portion being longer, it will require more time to build it so everything needs to be in place that much sooner.

Regarding the negotiations with the Amackers, Ferry told *Lake Tahoe News*, "I can't speak too much about it because there is a lot of legal stuff. The right-of-way process is very defined and confined, and involves a lot of legalese, money and contracts."

Amacker said the county wants 3 acres.

Where the trail goes on Amacker land the whole width of the path is on their property. Whereas the adjacent private property next to the California Tahoe Conservancy parcel, which is at the corner of Sawmill and Highway 50, comes with a dedicated right-of-way from Incline Road to the Highway, so less of their land is needed.

"I don't see any problems (with the other property)," Ferry said in terms of securing right-of-way agreements.

A small drainage easement is being sought on both properties because of an existing pipe.

Plans for the remainder of the Sawmill Trail are 80 percent designed.

Amacker contends the county and agencies, which he did not name, have cost him too much money and land in the past, so he is not willing to give his land away now. And he added that even if a price were settled on, that doesn't mean he'll ever sell.

Amacker told *Lake Tahoe News* his land is zoned for a 40-unit apartment complex, so he wants to be compensated for the land's potential, not for bare soil and trees.

However, Carl Weiland, El Dorado County assessor, said the Amacker ranch is zoned TR1. That would make it capable of having a single-family residence.

"I don't see anything saying he can have apartments," Weiland told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The ranch falls under Plan Area Statement 119 of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. The allowable uses are residential (not multi-family, which is what apartments fall under), recreation, resource management, and public service.

While the county and Amacker keep talking, the county is also working on plans to develop bike paths along Lake Tahoe Boulevard that would connect to the existing Sawmill path.

Ferry would like to do both sections of that route in 2014, though funding could force it to be built in phases. All of that land is publicly owned and deals are in place for it to become a reality.

The trail will require cyclists to come off the Sawmill Path and cross Lake Tahoe Boulevard. Going right, toward South Lake Tahoe, the path will be built on the dirt U.S. Forest Service trail that already exists. To the left, it will be adjacent to the roadway. It will tie into the class 2 bike trail that ends

at Clear View Drive.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)