

Lane advising group wanting to develop retail space at South Lake Tahoe convention center site

By Kathryn Reed

Six years after the first mound of dirt was moved on the then-\$410 million hotel-convention center project, more may be turned over.

Bill Owens, who owns 20 of the 29 parcels on the 11-plus-acre site by Stateline, is ready to build part of the project.

The goal is in summer 2013 work will begin on developing 30,000-square-foot of retail space – exactly what was originally planned. Depending on how fast work progresses, shops could be open by the holidays a year from now.

Owens owns about two-thirds of the project site on the east end of South Lake Tahoe. City National owns the other nine parcels that constitute about one-third of the site. The latter has not come forward with any ideas for that section.



A pedestrian on Dec. 13 walks from the fenced off non-existent convention center toward McP's Pub.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

In October, the city hired a structural engineer to determine if the concrete and rebar are stable. The report said there would be no problem building on top of what was laid years ago.

The City Council at its Dec. 11 meeting briefly discussed the resurrection of the project.

City Manager Nancy Kerry at the meeting said a performance bond and parcel consolidation map would be in place before construction crews return to the idle site.

Not having those helped contribute to the mess that has ensued. While Councilman Hal Cole now wants that bond, he at one time told this reporter there is no such thing as a performance bond.

Nonetheless, the council agreed to put Cole and Mayor Tom Davis on the ad hoc committee that will be working with the developer. Cole with then-Councilman John Upton were the only two electeds to have read the market report that did not favor a convention center, but told their peers to go ahead with it.

Randy Lane, the original builder who ran the now bankrupt Lake Tahoe Development Company, is an adviser to Owens and is the person to whom the city has been talking about moving forward. Owens is the leader of Owens Financial, one of the lending agencies that ended up with property when the largest development project in South Lake Tahoe's history folded.

Lane told *Lake Tahoe News* he expects to submit the necessary paperwork to South Lake Tahoe officials the first week of January.

Kerry said it could be a \$10 million infusion of cash into the local economy if construction resumes.

“It could be a catalyst for economic recovery in the area,” Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We are excited that something is going to get going and getting rid of the blight that is pulling down economic recovery.”

Sidewalks would be put in and other streetscape aspects as were originally planned. This will help with safety issues because right now there is minimal room to walk along the fenced-off site on Highway 50.

What businesses may go in there remains to be seen.

“I’m not concerned about the leasing part of it,” Lane said.

Originally McP’s Pub, which is still open at the western edge of the site, was going to move into the new center. It was going to be three times the size it is now, with a stage, more pool tables and expanded food menu.

Pete Joseph, who owns McP’s, is out of the town and unavailable for comment.

Lane said he had not spoken with Joseph to see if he would want to keep with the original plan.

This new first phase (the originally project had two phases) would stop short of the current McP’s bar-restaurant.

Making sure the public and businesses are secure is another concern of the city’s. The proposed development would go about one-third of the way from Highway 50 to Cedar Avenue. Right now it’s covered in concrete and rebar and has a cyclone fence around it.

Parking for the retail center would need to be worked out, too. In the first set of plans underground parking was to be provided for some aspects of the project. But the council and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency officials in the permits that were issued allowed for the project to go forward without adequate parking. The developer was supposed to secure parking

at Harveys, but that was never done. So, whether enough spaces would be incorporated into the project as it's put together in a piecemeal process remains to be seen.