

SLT trail talks stall; eminent domain likely

By Kathryn Reed

By mid-January South Lake Tahoe is expected to initiate eminent domain proceedings in order to build the El Dorado Beach to Ski Run bike trail.

The city doesn't want to take the property, but instead is seeking the right-of-way to build the multi-use path.

Based on some of the funding coming with strings per the federal government there is a time line for the money to be spent. If the project is not finished by June 2018, the city could lose about \$2.5 million in state and federal funding. The city might also be on the hook for refunding nearly \$1 million in grants that have been spent on design and planning if the trail were not to be built.



Heidi's in South Lake Tahoe believes losing a couple parking spaces and any change to the sign would hurt business. Photo/LTN

The bidding process cannot begin until the acquisitions are

completed per federal stipulations. The city wants bid documents to be ready this spring.

City staff repeatedly said the clock is ticking and time is of the essence.

While the City Council this month gave the affected properties 45 days to resolve the issue without going down this path, at least two of the properties don't appear to be willing to negotiate. This comes after the city began the dialogue more than a year ago.

Mary McCall, who owns a tiny slice of the needed property, told the electeds last week she feels pushed and coerced. She is a descendant of the pioneer Johnson family and said her family has given enough already.

A wedding chapel sits on the land. The city needs 126-square-feet of right-of-way. It has a value of \$7,500.

She is worried about relocating the sign, wonders why businesses on the other side of the street aren't affected, and said cyclists can ride in the street.

Don Rosenthal, who operates Heidi's restaurant, was speaking on behalf of the property owner. However, with a 40-year lease, Rosenthal has a huge stake in what occurs on this parcel at the Bijou Center.



The current trail is dirt and tree roots in places. Photo/LTN

The city wants 966-square-feet of right-of-way; offering \$15,000 for it. Safety, loss of parking and sign relocation are Rosenthal's biggest worries.

The engineering consultant on the project said concessions have been made, such as moving the trail as close to Highway 50 as possible for these people.

McCall and Rosenthal told the council they would try to work things out. Outside the meeting room and out of earshot of the electeds they said the opposite.

The city also needs 1,300 square feet (\$48,000) from Urbana Tahoe and 2,700 square feet (\$10,250) from Tahoe Beach and Ski Club. The latter is not contentious, but requires eminent domain to satisfy the homeowners' policy.

The city must offer fair market value, but cannot legally offer more. Property owners can take the city to court once eminent domain filings occur.