

# Pro-union workers against SLT Whole Foods

By Kathryn Reed

A labor union is trying to derail the Whole Foods project in South Lake Tahoe.

While the fight fizzled with the city, proponents are now taking their case to the California Tahoe Conservancy.

Local resident Donna Gilpin had filed an appeal challenging the Planning Commission's May 11 decision to approve what is locally known as the Whole Foods project. The project is formally called the Bijou Creek Watershed Project. It involves tearing down the Knights Inn on Highway 50.

Gilpin works for Safeway and is part of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union. Besides Safeway, UFCW represents employees at CVS, Rite-Aid, Kroger, Fred Meyer, Ralphs, King Soopers, Albertsons, Vons and other businesses. And like most unions, it tends to dislike non-union competitors.

Whole Foods workers are not unionized.

UFCW and other unions have a history of trying to block projects they don't want based on challenging aspects of the California Environmental Quality Act, while at no time stating the truth about the union issue.

"This is an abuse of the environmental process," City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

UFCW could not be reached for a comment, and Gilpin did not return multiple calls.

The union had people handing out anti-Whole Foods propaganda

in residential areas.

In order to challenge a project a local person who could be affected by it has to file the paperwork. That's where Gilpin came in.

The city on June 12 received Gilpin's four-sentence letter addressed to Kevin Fabian in Development Services saying she was withdrawing her appeal: "As we discussed I am not opposed to the city's Whole Foods project. Therefore, I hereby withdraw and disclaim my appeal and the attached letter. I agree that the project will ... improve the environment and am satisfied that the reasons for the appeal have been adequately addressed by the mitigated negative declaration for the project. After reconsideration I do agree that the Planning Commission acted appropriately in approving the project."

This is an about-face to what she said in her appeal where she cited five reasons she disagrees with the Planning Commission's decision; most having to do with the mitigated negative declaration.

In other locales this deceptive union tactic has cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees. Even South Lake Tahoe sought outside legal counsel when the appeal was filed.

There is a group on Facebook called Keep Lake Tahoe Local which is opposed to the Whole Foods 365 being built near the corner of Ski Run and Highway 50. That page is wanting people to sign a petition and to go to Thursday's California Tahoe Conservancy meeting. That board is considering allowing the city to manage seven parcels that it owns in the Bijou watershed project area. Those parcels would be part of the stream environmental zone restoration process.

The mitigated negative declaration is also on the agenda.

Despite the roadblocks being presented, the project is moving

forward. The now former owner of the Knights Inn and his family should be moving out next week. Demolition of the asbestos-ridden hotel is expected in mid-July.

The city owns the property and by the end of the month should close escrow with Halferty Development to acquire the land. That company also owns the parcel at 50 and Ski Run and will be developing the two sites in unison.