

Whole Foods already changing SLT neighborhood



The public will help decide the future of Herbert Avenue.
Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

A spotlight is being shined on a private street with a very public profile.

Herbert Avenue in South Lake Tahoe is one of those streets that is popular with people who live in the neighborhood. They use it to avoid Ski Run Boulevard.

Now the developers of Whole Foods 365 want to use Herbert as an access point, which could impact the commercial strip on the other side of the street.

The problem, though, is the city doesn't own the road. Mike

McKeen does.

According to McKeen, in the 1940s the street was dedicated to El Dorado County by the owner at the time. When the city incorporated in 1965, the dedication went to South Lake Tahoe. McKeen in 2003 bought the parcel fronting Highway 50 that stretches back and includes the apartment complex.

According to City Manager Nancy Kerry, "In 1946 that stretch of land was dedicated to the public – not to the city or the county. It is a dedication to the public."

McKeen told *Lake Tahoe News* there is some question as to whether the street was ever officially dedicated. He's been told he has a 50-50 chance of prevailing in court. Instead of going that route, McKeen is opting to work with the city.

He doesn't argue that there is a prescriptive easement on that stretch of asphalt. The city maintains the road – this includes plowing it, filling in pot holes, striping and any other maintenance.

"It's not worth the money or time to fight over it. No one wants to lose," McKeen told *Lake Tahoe News*.

There was a time when he wanted to develop into the street. Now he is willing to work with the city for the betterment for all.

"If I'm going to get any bonus from Whole Foods, it needs to be almost a continuous commercial area," McKeen said. "I have six tenants in the building. They can't be hurt at the expense of Whole Foods."

He envisions one day redeveloping at least some of what he owns so the commercial area seems like one contiguous entity.

Altering Herbert would help make that be more attractive to pedestrians in the area.

The idea being floated now is to have Herbert dead end at Bill Avenue, maybe making it a cul de sac. This would allow the Whole Foods that is going in where Knights Inn used to be to have access to Herbert, for McKeen's tenants to keep parking, and for the neighborhood to have less traffic.

The city is hosting a meeting Oct. 25 from 6-7:30pm at the Senior Center to gather community input about what the future of Herbert Avenue should be.

LSC Transportation Consultants, an engineering and planning firm with offices in Tahoe City and Colorado, has been hired by the city to do a traffic study.

The future of the street will ultimately be up to the City Council.

Halferty Development, the firm that owns the old Knights Inn parcel and adjacent lot on Ski Run, has the right to have an ingress/egress on Ski Run, Herbert, and two on Highway 50.

The original traffic study had parking on Herbert at the commercial strip owned by McKeen going from perpendicular to parallel. This would dramatically decrease the number of spaces.

Already employees in the area are affected by the elimination of spots because of the redevelopment project. Lloyd Avenue used to be where they parked, but that street has been abandoned and essentially incorporated into the project area.

McKeen said he sent a letter to 82 people in the neighborhood seeking input about Herbert Avenue changes, with many favoring altering Herbert. This week everyone may weigh in.