

Mystery propaganda emerges after SLT land sold

By Kathryn Reed

How Herbert Avenue will tie into the redevelopment project where Whole Foods 365 is being built just became a little murkier.

No longer is the commercial property on the corner of Herbert and Highway 50 locally owned.

Chutima Vasakarnpanich and Tavewat Youngunpipatkul of Palo Alto closed on the property Nov. 30. Mike McKeen was the seller.

McKeen had been **battling with the city** over ownership of Herbert Avenue.

"I did organize a good group of neighborhood support. We have since sold the property, couldn't commit to years of meetings," McKeen told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The leases on the two apartments in the back have been renewed by the new owners.

"It will continue at the moment as the way it is," Peggy Eichorn, who is managing the property for the couple, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "They like the mix of tenants and the town. It's investment property for them."

For now, that is the truth based on the fact they haven't submitted any plans to the city.

However, the day after the sale went through SouthLakeTahoeGroup.com was formed. That web address redirects people to a survey. The owner of the site is listed as private.

The survey questions are:

1. Would you be in favor of closing Herbert Ave at Bill Ave for through traffic? (Y/N)
2. Would you be in favor of putting in a stop light at Herbert Ave and Tahoe Blvd? (Y/N)
3. Would be [stet] in favor of rezoning the property from commercial and retail to high-density residential housing at the Bijou Marketplace site? (Y/N)
4. Would you be in favor of a mixed-use development that incorporated high-end retail shops below and housing above, at the Bijou Marketplace site? (Y/N)
5. If Whole Foods withdraws from the Bijou Marketplace, would you be in favor of a high-end restaurant taking its place? (Y/N)
6. The city of South Lake Tahoe has the ability to take over the homes and properties from private citizens abutting the Bijou Marketplace site. Are you in favor of the city utilizing Eminent Domain to take over these properties? (Y/N)
7. Do you feel that the City should take the decision of whether to build the Bijou Marketplace into their own hands? (Y/N)
8. If Whole Foods withdraws from Bijou Marketplace, would you be in favor of any of these retail establishments taking its place: Top Golf, Total Wine, a Night Club, a Cigar Bar, a Marijuana Superstore, or high-end clothing retailers? (Y/N)
9. What businesses would you like to see at the Bijou Marketplace site? (Multiple Answers)

The backers of South Lake Tahoe Group have not come forward.

They have sent material to neighbors encouraging them to take the survey. It talks about wanting to provide the city with high-end shopping, and to have the city take over the project through eminent domain.

City officials and Halferty Development, the company developing the site between Ski Run Boulevard and Herbert, both say they are not behind the South Lake Tahoe Group and don't know who is. Bijou Marketplace referenced in the survey is the name of the project.

The propaganda and even some of the questions are misleading. That's because the contract between Halferty, which owns the land being developed, and Whole Foods is described as iron clad by the developer. And while other tenants have been secured, the names of the businesses have not been released. There is still space available.

The city has no interest in regaining control of the property. It owned the Ski Run site for years, and basically in a pass-through had the land where the Knights Inn used to be. Plus, there are strict legal constraints when it comes to the use of eminent domain, which would not apply to this land. Even if it were legal, it would take a four-fifths vote of the City Council to allow it to happen.

Steve Teshara, who heads the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, said no one with his organization is behind the survey group.

Lake Tahoe News emailed the South Lake Tahoe Group and received no response, so the intent of their busy work remains a mystery.