

# Demolition Begins in Lafayette Street Project

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NORRISTOWN — The wall of the house crumbled like paper mache beneath the weight of the excavator, just after Montgomery County Commissioners Josh Shapiro and Leslie Richards announced plans for the Lafayette Street extension project Monday morning.

A project nearly 12 years in the making, the vacant home on Diamond Avenue is one of eight buildings to be razed for the extension of the thoroughfare from Norristown to Plymouth Township, commissioners explained to a small gaggle of the press.

The commissioners, accompanied by representatives of the county's transportation department and officials from Norristown and Plymouth, participated in the ceremonial demolition of part of the Diamond Avenue home, which is expected to improve local and regional access to Norristown and support revitalization.

"This is the beginning of a \$60 million transportation project here for Norristown and Plymouth Township," said Montgomery County Commissioner Leslie Richards.

"It's going to be a great gateway in and out of Norristown that will really help ease a lot of the traffic congestion. It will help people get to businesses, to work and to their homes, much faster."

Funded with PennDOT, county and federal money, the project will tear down vacant homes and one business along the west side of the street. All tenants have been relocated and the last of the business tenants will be relocated in August.

"This is the first concrete step in rebuilding Norristown, as we extend the Lafayette Street corridor and knock down this building, we reopen the gates of Norristown to all of Montgomery County to come, to work, to recreate and to play," said Montgomery County Commissioners Chairman Josh Shapiro.

"This is a great day for Montgomery County. It will give us now a great new entry way to Norristown from Lafayette Street. This is a project that many in the county have talked about and thought about for quite some time."

Objectives of the project include energizing economic recovery in Norristown and reducing traffic congestion during peak hours.

Kenneth Johnson, a resident of Diamond Avenue, looked on as the press conference took place. He said he was OK with it, but expressed concerns for the safety of his two young children, who play nearby.

“I guess they got to do what they got to do,” he told The Times Herald. “It’s going to be a lot of trouble. It’s got to be hectic out here. I just hope they don’t start too early in the morning. I’ve got my two little ones so I know they are not going to be able to play too much out here with all the construction going on.”

According to Leo Bagley, assistant director of the Montgomery County Planning Commission, the current width and deteriorated condition of the existing Lafayette Street — as well as its termination at Ford Street — cannot facilitate downtown or riverfront revitalization. Plans include incorporating green space and landscaping, removing the old, deteriorated railroad retaining wall and improving connectivity to the Schuylkill River and Chester Valley trails. Phase 1 of the plan involves extending Lafayette Street from Ford Street to Conshohocken Road by creating four lanes. Construction is slated to begin in the spring of 2013.

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