

Lafayette Corridor Project Delayed

By Margaret Gibbons
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COURTHOUSE - The Lafayette Street Corridor project, believed by many to be the key to the revitalization of Norristown's downtown business district, continues to inch forward.

However, the public will likely see no visible signs of this project until the end of 2008, according to Montgomery County Transportation Planning Chief Leo D. Bagley.

Because of the project's estimated \$125 million in construction costs and its scope, planners have broken the project into phases. The first phase involves the reconstruction and widening of Lafayette Street between Ford and Barbadoes Streets at an estimated cost of \$8 million to \$9 million, said Bagley. Construction on this phase should begin at the end of 2008, he said.

Other phases of the project will include:

- * Extending Lafayette Street from Ford Street, where it now dead-ends, to Conshohocken Road, at an estimated cost of \$14 million to \$15 million.
- * Construction of a new Pennsylvania Turnpike electronic interchange in the vicinity of the newly extended Lafayette Street at an estimated cost of \$40-plus million.
- * Construction of an exit ramp from the Dannehower Bridge to Lafayette Street to bring traffic downtown as well as avoid traffic tie-ups on Markley Street at an estimated \$40-plus million.

Bagley said construction on the new turnpike interchange should begin in 2010 and be completed in 2012 and Dannehower Bridge phase "sometime after that."

The county is paying 10 percent of the project's costs as is the turnpike commission, with the federal government paying 80 percent.

Bagley's update on the project came during Thursday's meeting of the county commissioners.

At their meeting, the commissioners approved a \$4 million extension of its contract with the Philadelphia engineering firm of McCormick Taylor Inc. to begin preliminary engineering work on the project. This will take about 15 months to complete. The county tapped McCormick Taylor in 2002 for engineering services for the project. The first contract called for environmental clearance studies and the like at a cost of \$3.3 million. That work is almost complete, said Bagley.

In a related matter, the county, in order to continue receiving federal funds for the project, signed off on an agreement indicating that it would resolve or remediate any environmental or historic issues that were raised in construction of the project. For example, said Bagley, if the project would disrupt any Native American burial ground, the county would have to propose how it would handle the situation and that solution would have to be approved by either The Delaware Nation or Shawnee, both which have also signed the agreement.

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