

## **Specter Visits, Throws Support Lafayette Street Project**

By Dan Kelley  
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NORRISTOWN - Though construction of the \$100 million Lafayette Street transportation project is almost four years away, a host of officials from all levels of government are working to acquire funds to pay for it.

If built, federal, state and county money will be used to fund what Mayor Ted LeBlanc is calling one of the most important investments in the borough in 30 years.

Construction on the one-mile project is expected to begin in 2008. Officials say it will provide access to currently underdeveloped land along the Schuylkill River, ease traffic on Main Street and provide access to the turnpike at Lafayette Street.

Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., a member of the powerful Senate appropriations committee, toured the site Tuesday.

Specter gave his support for the project and said he would work to earmark \$30 to \$40 million in a \$252 billion highway construction bill due to hit the Senate in January.

Congressman Jim Gerlach, R-6 Dist., confirmed that a version of the highway bill was in the House of Representatives.

"When we get back in mid-January, we'll try to get moving on this," Gerlach said. Leo Bagley, head of the transportation section of the county planning department said the plan has already received \$10 million, of which about \$3 million is spent.

A significant chunk of money, \$60M, from the turnpike commission is still in doubt. Tim Carson, vice-chairman of the turnpike commission, used the senator's visit as an opportunity to highlight the state of disrepair of the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Though the Lafayette Street project is on the commission's capital projects budget, Carson said he wasn't sure if the commission could afford it.

"It's one thing to get on the list," Carson said. "It is another thing to actually pay for it." Carson said that the commission's priorities lie in renovation of the entire turnpike system.

"One of the realities is," Carson said, "as terribly important as this project is, unless the turnpike gets new revenue sources" funding for the Lafayette Street project could be in jeopardy.

Overall, Specter said, Pennsylvania is slated to receive five percent of federal highway funds under the transportation bill currently before Senate.

Bagley said that Specter's visit was a sign the project would receive the money it needed.

Borough planning Director Jayne Musoyne said the Lafayette Street plan has been in the works since the late 1980s. She said that for the first time, it appeared as if the process was making progress.

LeBlanc clearly offers his support for the project. Everyone on the tour touted the project's economic development benefits.

"I think when you move into an area of depressed property values," Specter said, "it is well worth it. The tax projections on this look very, very good."

LeBlanc concurred. "You are right in the middle of everything," he said.

Carson also voiced support for the plan.

"This project has several benefits, Carson said. "It will spur jobs and investment, and we aren't encouraging additional sprawl."

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