

From the Philadelphia Inquirer...

\$60M Montco transportation project gets rolling

Jessica Parks, Inquirer Staff Writer

POSTED: Wednesday, September 11, 2013, 1:08 AM

http://www.philly.com/philly/news/20130911_60M_Montco_transportation_project_gets_rolling.html



NORRISTOWN A revitalization effort decades in the making took off this week, when local officials broke ground on a \$60 million transportation project.

The Lafayette Street expansion is expected to reduce traffic, spur economic development in the dilapidated Montgomery County seat, and restore access to a riverfront long hidden behind industrial walls and abandoned lots.

Norristown has suffered from a lack of easy highway access, with developers gravitating toward hubs like Upper Merion and Plymouth Meeting. But the municipality has been planning for a comeback, pinning its hopes on downtown and the riverfront.

"This is the catalyst we've been waiting for," Norristown Planning Director Jayne Musonye said of the project.

On Monday, officials from across the region gathered for a groundbreaking ceremony to mark the first phase - extending Lafayette Street from where it dead-ends at Ford Street to Conshohocken Road in Plymouth Township.

Musonye said developers are already calling about the area.

Closing that half-mile gap on Lafayette will open up a new route to the Norristown Transit Center and train station, and the Montgomery County courthouse, cutting traffic in half on commuter-choked Ridge Pike and Main Street, County Commissioner Leslie S. Richards said.

At Monday's gathering of current and former county and municipal officials, Richards also touted plans to widen Ridge Pike; add parking areas, landscaping, and streetlights; relocate and widen the Schuylkill River Trail; and add "parklike" access points to the river.

The long-range project calls for new exits off the Pennsylvania Turnpike and Route 202. Planning and funding for those phases are still being worked out.

According to the 2009 Economic Revitalization Strategy, Norristown's top three long-term priorities revolve around the Lafayette Street project and its promise of river access.

"So many people now drive through Norristown and do not even realize that we are on the Schuylkill River," Richards said.

Ruth Damsker, who worked on the Lafayette project as a county commissioner a decade ago, said Norristown "is really a jewel . . . that just needs some TLC."

Musonye said the borough's revitalization plan was modeled in part after areas like Manayunk and Conshohocken that have used the river as a focal point of redevelopment.

"We need to be able to use that as an asset," she said.

Traffic in the area will get worse during construction. But Richards said she hoped people will see "the promise on the other side."

"Construction is painful. There will be a lot of it before things get better," said Richards, who commutes from Whitemarsh to Norristown. "I will be sharing in your pain."

Contact Jessica Parks at jparks@philly.com, 610-313-8117, or follow on Twitter @ JS_Parks.

From the Norristown Times-Herald...

Lafayette Street corridor groundbreaking set for Monday in Norristown

By crotenberg@timesherald.com ">Carl Rotenberg, crotenberg@timesherald.com

POSTED: 09/07/13, 5:15 PM EDT |

NORRISTOWN — A groundbreaking ceremony for the first contract to extend Lafayette Street into Plymouth and widen it to four lanes will be held at 2 p.m. Monday at Ford and Lafayette streets.

The \$11.5 million contract with Allan A. Myers Inc. of Worcester will extend the existing Lafayette Street from Ford Street to Conshohocken Road. The 0.6-mile extension will have two lanes in each direction and a 12-foot landscaped median in the center.

“We are building a new road bridge over Ross Street for Lafayette Street. Ross Street is where the Schuylkill River Trail crosses under the Norfolk Southern railway bridge,” said Leo Bagley, the assistant director of the Montgomery County Planning Commission. “We are building a noise wall from Ross Street toward Conshohocken Road to protect the residences on Ross Street and Chestnut Street in Plymouth.”

The Schuylkill River Trail will be relocated and rebuilt next to the Lafayette Street extension, where it will serve as a sidewalk for the roadway. Trail users around the Ross Street crossing may be affected by limited closures for bridge work.

Construction on the 15-month project started on Aug. 12 in the Ross Street area with work on relocating sewer, natural gas and power lines.

“We are doing this to improve road access into Norristown and into Plymouth,” Bagley said. “The project will improve traffic flow and lessen congestion on Main Street and Ridge Pike. It will encourage the redevelopment of Norristown in the downtown area and the riverfront area.”

Updates on the progress of the construction project will be posted at www.lafayettetstreetproject.com every two weeks.

Construction will be paid by 80 percent federal funding and 20 percent funding from Montgomery County.

The extension of Lafayette Street will continue in August 2014 with a second contract for about \$20 million. The second contract award will be made in spring 2014.

The second project will extend Lafayette Street to Diamond Avenue in Plymouth and reconstruct and widen Diamond Avenue, as well as Ridge Pike from the Pennsylvania

Turnpike bridge to the Norristown border line. As part of Phase II, the Conshohocken Road connection to Ridge Pike will be abandoned, and the Diamond Avenue intersection with Ridge Pike will replace it with a new traffic light. Phase II will take two years to complete and will be finished in summer 2016.

Funding for the second contract has already been secured, Bagley said.

A third contract of about \$20 million to widen the existing Lafayette Street in Norristown will be awarded in late 2015 and begin in spring 2016.

The reconstruction and widening of the existing Lafayette Street in Norristown, from Ford Street to Barbadoes Street, will include two lanes in each direction and the landscaped median. The Schuylkill River Trail in that area will be relocated and rebuilt.

As part of that project, the Saw Mill Run storm culverts will be replaced during a 12-week period in 2016 when traffic will be detoured off Lafayette Street.

The two-year project, to be completed in late 2017, has not been funded yet.

The proposed connection of the Lafayette Street extension into a new Pennsylvania Turnpike interchange depends on new state revenue for the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT).

Another proposal to build a Dannehower Bridge interchange with Lafayette Street may come in 30 years, when PennDOT replaces the Dannehower Bridge. The bridge was built in the 1960s and will be 80 years old at that time, Bagley said.

The invited guests for the groundbreaking ceremony include state and federal elected officials, the current and former county commissioners, elected officials from Norristown and Plymouth and business supporters of the project.

“Since we have been at this for 13 years we have a lot of people who have had a hand in the project. There has been a lot of bipartisan support,” Bagley said. “Business people have championed the cause for this project. It is going to make downtown Norristown and the riverfront more marketable along with Plymouth.”

“The commitment over a long period of time speaks to the understanding of the importance of the project to Plymouth and, in particular, to Norristown,” said Frank Custer, the Montgomery County director of communications. “People have remained committed to it, and interest has not waned.”

The \$50 million-plus Lafayette Street project and the ongoing reconstruction of Markley Street for \$45 million represents “a huge investment in Norristown and the county seat,” Bagley said.

“It will benefit motorists who travel everywhere.”

Follow Carl Rotenberg on Twitter @CarlWriter.

<http://www.timesherald.com/general-news/20130909/lafayette-street-corridor-groundbreaking-set-for-monday-in-norristown>

From the Norristown Times-Herald...

Lafayette Street corridor project underway in Norristown



Montgomery County Commissioners Josh Shapiro and Leslie Richards hold a ground breaking ceremony for the Lafayette Street Project near Ford Street in Norristown Sept. 9, 2013. Photo by Gene Walsh / Times Herald Staff

By crotenberg@timesherald.com ">Carl Rotenberg,crotenberg@timesherald.com

POSTED: 09/09/13, 5:45 PM EDT | UPDATED: 18 HRS AGO

NORRISTOWN — The Monday afternoon groundbreaking ceremony for the \$11.5 million Lafayette Street corridor project attracted nearly 100 state and local leaders and community members to the intersection of Ford and Lafayette streets.

“Today we break ground on a transformative project more than a decade in the making,” said Montgomery County Commissioners’ Chairman Josh Shapiro. “It will open up a critical corridor to our county seat, create jobs, make our waterfront more accessible and ease congestion.”

The 0.6-mile extension of the existing Lafayette Street, from Ford Street to Conshohocken Road, will have two lanes in each direction and a 12-foot landscaped median in the center. The Schuylkill River Trail will be relocated and become the sidewalk for the Lafayette Street extension.

Shapiro said the project began in March 2000 when the commissioners awarded a \$50,000 contract in March 2000 to improve road access to Norristown. He thanked former Congressman Joseph Hoeffel for securing a \$10 million federal highway grant in 2001 that was followed by an additional \$20 million “obtained by Hoeffel, Congressman (James) Gerlach and (U.S.) Senator (Arlen) Specter” for the project.

“This project is critical to both Plymouth and Norristown,” Shapiro said. “It will improve access to both municipalities, increase traffic flow and reduce congestion on Ridge Pike and Main Street and will encourage development of Norristown’s downtown and its under-utilized riverfront area.”

“This is how government is supposed to work. With everyone working together,” Shapiro said. “It’s also an example of the critical role that government can play when we work together at each level - federal, state, county and local.”

Montgomery County Vice Chairman Leslie Richards said the project would “change the way Norristown is perceived.”

“This is a huge day for transportation,” Richards said. “I’m very excited to see the changes coming over the next years.”

Crandall Jones, the Norristown municipal administrator, called the road project “an economic infusion of capital into the community.”

“We are excited to partner with everyone,” Jones said, “and we are looking forward to seeing this transformation come to life.”

Plymouth Council Chairman Sheldon Simpson said the project would relieve the “congestion of traffic on Ridge Pike” for Plymouth residents.

“This project will open up Ridge Pike,” Simpson said. “Over the next 15 years it will open up new opportunities for businesses on Conshohocken Road. We’re excited by that prospect.”

The 15-month project, the first of three contracts, will be completed with 80 percent federal funding and 20 percent funding from Montgomery County.

The extension of Lafayette Street will continue in August 2014 with a second contract for about \$20 million. That contract award will be made in spring 2014.

The second project will extend Lafayette Street to Diamond Avenue in Plymouth and reconstruct and widen Diamond Avenue, as well as Ridge Pike from the Pennsylvania Turnpike bridge to the Norristown border line. As part of Phase II, the Conshohocken Road connection to Ridge Pike will be abandoned, and the Diamond Avenue intersection with Ridge Pike will replace it with a new traffic light. Phase II will take two years to complete and will be finished in summer 2016. Funding for the second contract has already been secured.

A third contract of about \$20 million to widen the existing Lafayette Street in Norristown will be awarded in late 2015 and begin in spring 2016.

The reconstruction and widening of the existing Lafayette Street in Norristown, from Ford Street to Barbadoes Street, will include two lanes in each direction and the landscaped median. The Schuylkill River Trail in that area will be relocated and rebuilt. The two-year project, to be completed in late 2017, has not been funded yet.

Hoeffel, a former Montgomery County commissioner, attended the groundbreaking along with former county commissioners Jim Matthews and Ruth Damsker.

Hoeffel called the road project an “economic development opportunity of the highest order. It is huge to open up the Norristown waterfront and it will grant enough access to encourage development of the waterfront.”

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<http://www.timesherald.com/general-news/20130910/lafayette-street-corridor-project-underway-in-norristown>

From the Doylestown Intelligencer...

Montco breaks ground on transportation project to spark Norristown's economy



Photo: Rick Kintzel

Groundbreaking for Lafayette Street Corridor Transportation Project intended to boost economic growth in Montco's county seat in Norristown.

Posted: Tuesday, September 10, 2013 5:00 am | Updated: 7:00 am, Tue Sep 10, 2013.

By Margaret Gibbons Staff writer

Montgomery County and Norristown officials are hoping that a \$100 million investment in asphalt, concrete and greenery will breathe new life into the county's economically downtrodden county seat in Norristown.

"This is a transformative project that has been more than a decade in the making," said county Commissioner Chairman Josh Shapiro. "It will open up the critical corridor of our county seat. It will create jobs. It will make our under-utilized waterfront more accessible and will relieve congestion in Norristown and Plymouth."

Shapiro's comments came Monday during a groundbreaking ceremony, attended by some 70 past and current government officials and planners, for the Lafayette Street Corridor construction project.

The overall project, which has been on the drawing board since 2000 and has been through various design and engineering phases since that time, will cost an estimated \$100 million, with some \$60 million earmarked for actual construction. The federal government will pay 80 percent of the tab, with the county picking up the remaining 20 percent.

The first phase of the construction work began last month. That phase involves extending Lafayette Street, which now dead-ends at Ford Street in Norristown, 0.6 of a mile to Conshohocken Road and Diamond Avenue in Plymouth. This portion of the construction project, which also involves building a new bridge, carries an \$11.5 million price tag. It should be completed within the next 15 months.

The second phase calls for the widening and improvements of Ridge Pike, Diamond Avenue and Fairfield Road in Plymouth. During the third phase, Lafayette Street will be reconstructed and widened, and the county's popular Schuylkill River Trail will be relocated off of an existing viaduct and into a more park-like setting. Officials said they are hoping that construction on these two phases, which have not yet been put out to bid but will each cost an estimated \$20 million, will wrap up by fall 2017.

Future plans call for the construction of two new interchanges on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, one that would bring traffic into the Lafayette Street Corridor from the Ridge Pike area in Plymouth and another at Route 202 near the Dannehower Bridge between Norristown and Upper Merion.

Officials have said they hope the Lafayette Street Corridor project will bring more traffic into the downtown Main Street business section of Norristown while also providing easy access to the riverfront along the Schuylkill River. Officials have looked at the 2 miles of riverfront as a prime area for new development that could spark the town's economy.

Michael D. Marino, a Norristown native who was elected county commissioner in November 1999, immediately after his election went to the county planning commission, asking it to "brainstorm" what the county could do to help Norristown.

One of those responses came from county transportation planning chief Leo Bagley, who suggested that access to the county seat needed to be improved if development and redevelopment was to take place. The Lafayette Street Corridor project evolved from that brainstorming session and had been carried through by subsequent administrations and planning commission boards.

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From the Norristown Patch...

Lafayette Street Corridor Project Kicks Off in Groundbreaking Ceremony

The project, to improve Norristown access, is over 10 years in the making.

Posted by [Nicole Foulke](#) (Editor), September 10, 2013 at 04:00 PM



Norristown Municipal Hall.

The \$11.5 million Lafayette Street corridor project groundbreaking ceremony brought almost 100 government and community members together at Ford Street and Lafayette Street in Norristown on Monday, [according to The Times Herald](#).

"Today we break ground on a transformative project more than a decade in the making. It will open up a critical corridor to our county seat, create jobs, make our waterfront more accessible and ease congestion," said Josh Shapiro, Chairman of the Montgomery County Commissioners.

The extension, 0.6 miles, will affect Lafayette Street from Ford Street to Conshohocken Road. There will be 2 lanes in each direction, as well as 12-foot-long median in the middle.

The Schuylkill River Trail will be moved and will then be converted into the Lafayette Street extension sidewalk.

According to Shapiro, the project was started in March 2000 when the then-commissioners bestowed a \$50,000 contract that month to improve road access

going to Norristown. Shapiro thanked Joseph Hoeffel, the former Congressman, for obtaining a \$10 million federal highway grant in 2001. There came later \$20 million more "obtained by Hoeffel, Congressman (James) Gerlach and (U.S.) Senator (Arlen) Specter" for the project.

The project is slated to take 15 months and is the first of three contracts. The funding breaks down into 20 percent from Montgomery county funds and 80 percent from federal funds.

The Lafayette Street extension, which is to extend Lafayette Street to Diamond Avenue in Plymouth township, widen Diamond Avenue, and reconstruct a section of Ridge Pike, has a second contract of \$20 million and will continue in Aug. 2014.

The connection between Conshohocken Road and Ridge Pike will be let go and replaced with a new traffic light where Diamond Avenue and Ridge Pike intersect. This is set to be completed in 2014 and funding has been obtained.

A third, \$20 million contract for increasing the size of Lafayette Street in Norristown is to be awarded in 2015 and is set to begin in early 2016.