

Phase I of Lafayette Street extension in Norristown on-time and on-budget

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construction crew works on the beams of one of the bridges at the Lafayette Street extension Friday, May 30, 2014. Photo by Adrianna Hoff/Times Herald Staff.

NORRISTOWN — Nine months into a 15-month, \$11.5 million extension and widening of Lafayette Street into Plymouth, the Phase I project is within budget and on schedule for completion in November.

The contract with Allan A. Myers Inc. of Worcester will extend the existing Lafayette Street from Ford Street in Norristown to Conshohocken Road and widen it to four lanes. The 0.6-mile extension will have two lanes in each direction and a 12-foot-wide, landscaped median in the center. Construction on the project started on Aug. 12, 2013, in the Ross Street area with work on relocating sewer, natural gas and power lines.

A recent walking tour for The Times Herald was conducted by Leo Bagley, assistant director of the Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC); John Zawaski,

transportation/construction manager for CMC Engineering; Frank Custer, the Montgomery County communications director and Matthew Edmond, a senior transportation planner for the MCPC.

The group entered the construction site through the back of a Main Street parking lot and walked downstream on the recently paved “base” course of the relocated Schuylkill River Trail. The trail dips downhill toward Ross Street between two concrete retaining walls that are decorated on both sides with a “wave” pattern reminiscent of the nearby Schuylkill River and a honeycomb pattern intended to depict the honey bees that have been a Norristown symbol. Both walls are painted in a light blue hue.

“The patterns were selected by the Norristown Arts Council,” said Bagley. “We are now selecting a caulk tint to match the panels.”

The new bike and pedestrian trail currently has six inches of gravel and a 3 1/2-inch base course of asphalt. The final “wearing” course will be installed in late fall after all landscaping work is completed.

The lowest level of the trail is bisected by the Ross Street extension, which will allow truck access to the East Norriton-Plymouth-Whitpain Joint Sewer Authority treatment plant. Massive concrete bridge abutments have been finished, and workmen on Thursday were walking across the recently installed concrete bridge trusses to install scaffolding for the concrete deck and parapets.

Ross Street, which has several dozen rowhouses and a storage yard, is the dividing line between Norristown and Plymouth.

On the far side of the bridge abutment, a large uphill slope of dirt was pockmarked with the remnants of a trash deposit.

Zawaski said that over several decades the area in Plymouth near the Schuylkill River was used for dumping construction debris and trash. It will need to be excavated before gravel for the Lafayette Street roadbed can be laid down and compacted.

A large pit was being dug where the concrete footings for a retaining wall and sound wall barrier will be built. The sound barrier will shield residents living in the homes on Ross Street, Broad Street and Chestnut Street in Plymouth.

At the top of the slope, another work crew was removing the metal box forms from the sides of concrete footings for the sound barrier. This area of the construction site, bounded by a row of trees and the fence for construction equipment, has not yet been touched by the construction crews, Bagley said.

Construction on the 0.6-mile extension of Lafayette Street will be completed in late fall, but it will not be opened to traffic until Phase II, an \$11 million to 15 million Lafayette Road extension, is completed in spring 2016, Bagley said.

The second project will extend Lafayette Street to Diamond Avenue in Plymouth; reconstruct and widen Diamond Avenue along with a section of Ridge Pike, from the Pennsylvania Turnpike bridge to the Norristown border at Ross Street. 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.

Early cost estimates for Phase II were \$20 million, but new estimates have trimmed the cost, Bagley said. Bids on the second project will be reviewed and awarded in September and the relocation of utilities will begin in winter 2015.

“We had ball park estimates on the elements,” Bagley said, “so now we have a more precise estimate.”

Updates on the progress of the construction project are posted at www.lafayettestreetproject.com every two weeks.

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

A third contract to widen the existing Lafayette Street in Norristown, from Ford Street to Barbadoes Street, has not been funded yet. It will include two lanes in each direction and the landscaped median.

Project maps and drawings of the finished street extension can be seen at norristown.org/userfiles/file/LafStreetBrochureApril13.pdf.

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