

Julieann Lutrario

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In May/June of 2013 expect major delays on ever-busy Reservoir Street. The now two-lane road is going to be expanded to four lanes with a sidewalk and a bike path on either side. Students and faculty of James Madison University and Harrisonburg residents are going to see a severe increase in traffic during the year and a half construction period.

“Its not the students that are the issue, it’s the faculty that work at JMU who contribute the most to the traffic” says Vice-Mayor, Ted Byrd

Until the construction of Copper Beach Townhomes and the new Rockingham Memorial Hospital, Reservoir Street was not an issue. Reservoir is a major connector road to the university, downtown, the shopping district, and many off-campus student apartments.

Currently Reservoir Street is a two-lane road with no sidewalk. The new street, starting a little bit before University Boulevard, is going to be a four-lane road with raised medians and sidewalks and bike paths on either side of the street.

“One thing we consistently heard from the community was that they wanted bike paths and sidewalks.” Assistant Director of Public Works Drew Williams says, “We wanted to give the community what they wanted.”

This will be the third revision of Reservoir Street. The road was redone for a second time in 2001. At that time there was not significant need for a larger road. With JMU growing in population and Harrisonburg rapidly growing, the road cannot handle the large amount of traffic.

“In 2001 we didn’t think we needed to make a bigger road,” said Vice-Mayor Byrd, “but this time it needs to be done; we have to fix this problem now.”

With increased construction on Reservoir, not only will there be traffic delays, but the added problem of many relocated families.

The city has to buy 102 parcels of land from Harrisonburg residents. Harrisonburg hires an outside appraiser to assign value to the land and homes that need to be moved. The city then talks to the families and negotiates deals on the price of the land or the house. If the family does not want to move, the city has the right to condemn the house.

This process takes about a year to complete. Chris, a representative from McCormick and Taylor (the project design engineering firm) says this task should be getting underway seeing as construction is projected to begin in 2013.

The reconstruction is projected to start in the summer of 2013 and end in the winter of 2014. Currently the planning process is 60 percent complete. McCormick and Taylor still has to find money, move utilities, and hire a construction company to actually build the road.

“Building the road is not the issue. The issue is moving the utilities. The power lines supply power to Costco, the gas stations, and JMU so we have a lot to do before the road actually gets built.” Said Williams.

During the September 23rd city council meeting, the financial plan for the project was not passed. Many options were offered but the council is trying to get the lowest interest rate, pay for most of the road upfront, and add on special programs to the project.

“We are trying to get the best deal we can. This is a good time to build roads; the price is just what we want to pay.” Said Byrd.

The price cap on the project is 14 million dollars. During the October 25th meeting the council is expected to pass the financial plan.

Although the road construction is going to benefit a lot of people, many are going to be negatively affected. There are going to be more delays and families are also going to be

relocated. In understanding the full affect of this construction problem, the question becomes: Is the increasing traffic really important enough to uproot established families and force them to relocate?

Sources:

Drew Williams-Assistant Director of Public Information

540-434-5928

Dreww@harrisonburgva.gov

Ted Byrd-Vice Mayor

RBaugh@hooverpenrod.com

Chris-McCormick and Taylor

804-762-5800

ph.mkt@mccormicktaylor.com