

Streetscape project's cost to businesses still unclear

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WAYNESBURG - The borough's long-anticipated streetscape project will go to bid in July, but questions remain about how much property owners along its five-block route will have to contribute.

Waynesburg officials and business owners discussed the situation at the council meeting Monday.

The borough and the downtown revitalization group Waynesburg Prosperous and Beautiful have about \$1.6 million in state grants that will pay to bury utility lines and pay for other improvements.

However, property owners will be responsible for the cost of hooking up their buildings, from their property lines to the meters. They will have to pay for any necessary upgrades to the electrical systems in their buildings as well.

Borough officials do not have final plans concerning the utility line relocation, so business owners are unable to obtain estimates on how much the streetscape project will cost them.

"We're at an impasse," said Mary Beth Pastorius of the merchant group, Waynesburg Investment Network.

The project architect, Pennoni Associates, is working on a final design, which will be submitted to the state Department of Transportation in a few weeks. More detailed information about the utilities should be available by then.

In the meantime, Robbie Matesic, executive director of economic development for Greene County, said she would try to organize a public viewing of the plans that are in place at this point, so that the merchants can have a better understanding of what to expect.

Pastorius said she also is concerned that some property owners will balk at the idea of paying for rewiring their buildings. She said most of the business owners she contacted want the streetscape and are willing to pay a reasonable amount. Some buildings though, particularly on the Cumberland to Morgan block of High Street, are unoccupied.

Any holdouts may not endanger the project, according to Mike Dufalla, borough engineer. It is possible that the utility meters could be installed at each building, leaving it up to the property owners to connect their building if they want electrical, phone or cable service.

Pastorius asked council to investigate funding sources that may help business owners pay for this expense. The borough cannot use grant money it already obtained for the project because it is intended for use on the public right-of-way only.

The streetscape project will revamp three blocks on High Street, from Cumberland to Washington streets and two blocks on Washington, from High to Wayne streets. The project is supposed to be similar to Main Street revitalization efforts in Uniontown, Washington and other towns. Tree-lined streets and decorative sidewalks are supposed to make Waynesburg a more attractive place to visit and shop.

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