

City Reveals Improvements Planned for N. Central Street

Redevelopment Director Bob Whetsel laid out the city's short-term plans for improvements on part of North Central Street this fall at a Sept. 30, public meeting at the Knox County Health Department.

Whetsel also provided a tentative timeline for other, long-term projects, in the city's comprehensive effort to help residents and businesses transform the Downtown North Redevelopment Area into a thriving commercial and residential district.

North Central is a key part of Downtown North, which is bounded by Depot Street to the south, I-275 to the west, Woodland Avenue on the North and Hall of Fame Drive to the east.

The first order of business was a presentation of the city's plan to re-stripe Central from Woodland Avenue to Baxter Avenue later this fall. Part of that four-block segment, Woodland to Oklahoma will also be repaved this fall while the remainder will be repaved next year.

The work is the first step in turning the city's plans for the area into a concrete reality.

Whetsel told residents and business owners attending the meeting that a road diet will reduce Central from Woodland to Baxter from the current four lanes of traffic to a street featuring travel lanes in each direction with a center turn lane. Bike lanes will be added to the portion between Woodland and Oklahoma and approximately 30 on-street parking spots will be added from Oklahoma to Baxter.

The city is currently limited from any work on Central Street south of Baxter Avenue until the Knoxville Utilities Board finishes its planned wastewater system improvements there.

Jason Brooks, with KUB, said the utility will be making improvements from Baxter south to Broadway. The construction work is expected to begin early next year and conclude in July.

"Whether we resurface and re-stripe the rest of Central next year depends on how our planning and funding goes," Whetsel said.

The city is using existing resources and programs to provide the needed infrastructure improvements for Downtown North.

Long-term, Whetsel told the audience that the city hopes to ultimately develop a bike friendly street all the way along Central across Broadway and into downtown in addition to doing streetscape improvements along that route.

Part of those streetscape improvements will be the addition of sidewalk features on North Central which the city hopes to begin work on sometime next year.

The city is also in the early stages of planning for improvements beneath the I-40 overpass where it crosses the Downtown North area and for the development of a possible frontage road along I-275 from the area just north of World's Fair Park to Woodland and Oldham Avenues.

This was the third public meeting to either gather citizen input on Downtown North Redevelopment plan or to outline how the city will physically implement the plans. The city anticipates continuing the meetings as the revitalization effort continues.