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City scraps Boulevard upgrades for now

Diverts attention to two other improvement projects in Colonial Heights

By Sean Jones

Staff Writer

COLONIAL HEIGHTS — Construction is set to begin on two infrastructure projects in the city after City Council voted to scrap two improvement projects that were already underway.

Without enough state funding to cover four projects, the city opted to focus its attention on only two.

Phase five of the Appomattox River Trail is set to begin in July 2021, with its completion scheduled in November that year. Phase five would add about a half mile of trail north of Boulevard. The previous four phases total around 3 miles south, or downstream of Boulevard, which starts at Roslyn Park.

The second project is sidewalk improvements for North Elementary School. Colonial Heights previously approved adding the sidewalk around North Elementary, starting on Dale Avenue, connecting to Rose Avenue. The newly approved, second phase in that plan will add connecting sidewalks on Eastman Avenue, Hillcrest Avenue, and Orange Avenue, in the nearby neighborhood.

The two scrapped projects were improvements to the Boulevard, including lighting, landscaping and sidewalks between James Avenue and A Avenue, and another section between A Avenue to Temple Avenue.

All four improvements were to be partially funded through the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). TAP offers 80% aid on local infrastructure projects for pedestrian, bicycle and nonmotorized forms of transportation.

TAP would have funded about \$3.3 million, leaving the city with a funding deficit of about \$1.5 million that it would be responsible for all four projects. The Boulevard projects would cost the city \$930,000 of that deficit. Public Works recommended that council cancel the Boulevard projects to pursue the Appomattox Regional Trail and North Elementary school sidewalks.

“The approach I recommended was, let’s take the money from those two projects now temporarily, and apply later for programs that fully fund the Boulevard,” said Public Works Director William Henley.

Colonial Heights is required to repay \$40,000 in federal and state funds that was already expended on the Boulevard projects. The City will have to reapply in the future for TAP funding to finish those projects.

“You have to do it in phases,” Henley said. “... The intent is to continue those improvements all the way through the city.”

Henley said Colonial Heights plans to complete the entire Boulevard with sidewalks and travel improvements. A city application for VDOT funds came back with a \$62 million total cost estimate to finish Boulevard improvements.

With the reallocation of TAP funding, Colonial Heights will pay \$355,000 for the trail and school sidewalks, while TAP funding will put in \$1.7 million.

Both projects set to begin in the summer of 2021. *Sean Jones can be reached at 804-722-5712 or sjones@progress-index.com*

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