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TOP STORY

\$2.2M improvement project slated for Marlboro Street

By Sierra Hubbard Sentinel Staff Dec 23, 2018

Marlboro Street in Keene will undergo \$2.2 million worth of utility improvements and above-ground reconstruction next summer, and city staff will field questions about the project at an open house next month.

Brett Rusnock, a civil engineer with the city, said staff is eager to get feedback about the plans.

“It’s hard to get people excited about a utility project,” Rusnock said. “... But we want people to understand why we’re spending this money, how it will improve their community, and we want people to get excited about both the utility and the accompanying streetscape features.”

Utility improvements are the primary impetus for the project, which will stretch down Marlboro Street from Main Street to Eastern Avenue, Rusnock said. Also, substandard sections of sewer mains will be replaced, and crews will reinforce an existing water main beneath the street.

“It’s generally a cost-saving measure that is cheaper than digging up a pipe and replacing it in kind,” Rusnock said, “and it allows us to get a little bit more ... length out of our limited utility budget.”

Two water mains along Marlboro Street, City Engineer Donald R. Lussier said, and both are in use. One was installed in the 1890s, “so we definitely got our money’s worth out of that pipe,” he said. The water main that will be lined during the project was installed in the 1930s.

Lussier said Keene’s aging infrastructure, like that in many older municipalities, has challenges and repair needs. The city prioritizes utilities projects, he said, but staff recognizes that these systems don’t exist in a vacuum.

In the case of Marlboro Street, Lussier said, next year’s utility project is the last of a four-pronged approach to accomplish several goals. Staff considered community conversations about Keene’s east side, he said, and addressed rezoning, revitalization and economic development first.

“We know that we’ve got to do this infrastructure work in the very near future, so let’s try to coordinate it and sequence it so that we’re doing everything at once,” Lussier said. “We put together a complete package and we try to solve as many of these problems at once as possible.”

Utility repairs will be the focus, Rusnock said, but the construction gives the city a chance to improve Marlboro Street above ground, too.

Crews will replace curbs where needed and realign others; replace damaged sections of sidewalk; repave the road; incorporate green space and rain gardens where available; and implement Complete Streets features, such as striped bike lanes and traffic-calming measures that encourage drivers to slow down.

Lussier said the traffic-calming measures are recommendations from Wheelock Elementary School’s Safe Routes to School Action Plan, published in 2015.

The city has also applied for a federal grant that, if awarded, would add another \$478,000 to the project budget for those above-ground improvements, Lussier said. Staff should find out next month if Keene received the grant.

Rusnock said the project will begin in the summer, as soon as the ground thaws, and will likely last about six months.

Lussier said the work will not be without some disruptions for motorists. Most of the construction will be done with alternating one-way traffic, he said, but there might be a few times when Marlboro Street is closed for sewer main replacements and drivers will be detoured.

Staff will host an information session in the Blastos Room at Keene Ice Jan. 15 from 4:30 until about 7:30 p.m. Lussier said the evening will offer a variety of formats to cater to residents with different needs. An open house-style session with design consultants available to answer questions will be from 4:30 to 6 p.m.

A presentation on the project will begin at 6 p.m., and staff will stick around afterward to take more questions “until people get sick of talking about Marlboro Street,” Lussier said.

Anyone with questions about the project can email Rusnock at [brusnock @ci.keene.nh.us](mailto:brusnock@ci.keene.nh.us).

Sierra Hubbard can be reached at 355-8546 or at shubbard@keenesentinel.com. Follow her on Twitter at [@SierraHubbardKS](https://twitter.com/SierraHubbardKS).