

Streetscape Begins Sights, sounds of construction fill downtown

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Photo by LYDELLE ABBOTT/*The Kentucky Standard*

Traffic was restricted to one lane Tuesday on North Third Street approaching Broadway Avenue while crews prepared to lay new water line. After the water line is completed, construction on the Streetscape project will begin.

It's here. The orange cones, restricted lanes and construction crews downtown mean the long-anticipated, multi-million-dollar construction project has begun.

Crews are currently working on the new water line. They started at Broadway Avenue instead of in front of Bethlehem High School because the elevation is higher at Broadway, so if it rains the water would flow away from the ditches, City Engineer Larry Hamilton said. The new water line will run along North Third Street from Broadway Avenue to Court Square and around the square, tying into a major line near Bethlehem High School. It is aimed at improving downtown water pressure, including that of fire hydrants and sprinkler systems, and will provide another looping method in case of a break.

Engineer Rob Martin with QK4, which is overseeing the project, said water line construction would take about one week per block. He expects work to begin around Court Square by the end of the week. After the line is laid there, crews will proceed down West Stephen Foster Avenue toward Bethlehem.

Martin asked the public to be patient with the timetable, as it is subject to change depending on what crews encounter as the project goes along. He also cautioned drivers to be aware of lane width reductions.

Hamilton said traffic flow seemed to be going well so far, but that there's nothing that can be done about "fugitive dust," which is inevitable with any construction project.

The target date for water line completion is July 4. It will be followed by Streetscape construction, which will involve new sidewalks, changes to the traffic flow and appearance around the Old Courthouse, uniform benches and lighting, etc. Streetscape is aimed at beautifying downtown while improving traffic flow and making the square safer for pedestrians.

The completion deadline for the entire project is Nov. 30. Crews will work most daylight hours Monday through Thursday, and sometimes up to 10 p.m. and possibly midnight.

The city received \$1.9 million in federal stimulus funds and \$659,000 from the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet for the project. U.S. Rep. Brett Guthrie secured \$150,000 for the water line. The city will match the remaining cost either financially or through in-kind services.

Engineers, city officials and construction representatives will meet every Monday to come up with a two-week forecast, which they will share with downtown merchants via e-mail. Check The Kentucky Standard for continued updates.