

Another sneak peak at North Union project

By Christopher Michel, Olean Times Herald | Posted: Wednesday, March 19, 2014 12:13 pm

Plans unveiled at 40 percent completion stage

OLEAN — The public again caught a glimpse of what the future holds for downtown Olean.

Officials from Hatch-Mott-MacDonald held an open house early Tuesday evening at the city's Municipal Building to showcase its designs for the North Union Street streetscape project. Hatch-Mott is the Buffalo-based engineering firm designing the project.

Plans for North Union's \$8.85 million overhaul are 40 percent complete, said Jeff Lebsack, a transportation engineer and planner from the engineering firm.

"The important thing I want to stress is that we are totally on time with everything during the design process," Mr. Lebsack told the Times Herald.

Several items — including a park bench, bike rack, and street light — were on display in the Olean Municipal Building's lobby for the approximate 100 open house attendees to view and comment on. In addition, Hatch-Mott also had several architectural renderings of the street and options for design elements, like landscaping, on display.

"This is exciting to me," said Mayor Bill Aiello. "It's really encouraging to see how many people came. And out of all the people I talked to, I only spoke with one person who was absolutely against this project ... I think the majority of the people have accepted this project and are getting behind it."

"We've wanted the public to be involved in this process every step of the way," added Olean Common Council President Ann McLaughlin, D-Ward 2. "... The attendance we had tonight was wonderful ... and we will continue to keep the community engaged in all this."

Though North Union's plans, as they stand, were generally well-received by open house attendees, Mr. Lebsack did field questions on several concerns, particularly about snow management, traffic lane width for emergency vehicles and the type of plants that will be planted along the street.

Mr. Lebsack said project designers have been cognizant of those concerns. He said snow will continue to be plowed to the center of North Union as it always has; each lane of traffic is 12-foot wide with buffers on either side, leaving "plenty of room for fire trucks and people to pull over"; and designers are looking into what plants can weather snow and salt best.

Hatch-Mott engineers plan to unveil the "90 percent" plans in May.

Mr. Lebsack said engineers are now focusing on the finer points of the plans, deciding on placement of light poles and garbage cans, as well as how landscaping will help manage stormwater flow, among other details.

He noted that new lights installed along the street will use LED bulbs, which will reduce energy costs, and power lines will be buried underground.

Major elements of the streetscape project include reducing the street from four lanes of traffic to two to make way for two 6-foot-wide bike lanes and an 8-foot-wide center median; replacing the underground water, sewer and storm sewer lines; installing new street lights; putting in single-lane roundabouts at five of North Union's seven intersections; and widening the sidewalks on both sides of the street by 2 feet.

The final version of the plans will be presented to the Common Council in June. If approved, the city will then put the project out to bid and select a contractor by August.

Some construction work is anticipated to start in October.

"It won't be anything too major," Mr. Lebsack said. "It might be some smaller things, like cutting down trees. We might also start relining some of the sewer lines."

Work on the bulk of the project is slated to start in spring 2015. The overhaul will be divided into quarters, with crews working first between North Union's intersection with Main Street and the railroad tracks.

"On that end, the concentration of businesses isn't like it is in the south end of the project," Mr. Lebsack said. "We think it would be best to start there so the contractor can get an idea of what to expect during actual construction before they start work where more businesses and parking is located."

North Union's makeover is scheduled for completion at the end of summer 2016.

In the meantime, Mr. Lebsack said Hatch-Mott officials and those from the city involved in the project will continue their public outreach efforts.

"We'll be talking with individual property owners about any issues they have with the plans and continue to keep the public informed of where this project is at," he said. "This is really a project for the community."

(Contact reporter Christopher Michel at cmichel@oleantimesherald.com. Follow him on Twitter, @OTHChris)