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Council OKs North College Avenue roadway improvements

BY KEVIN DUGGAN

KevinDuggan@coloradoan.com

A plan to begin transforming a half-mile stretch of North College Avenue received a green light Tuesday from the Fort Collins City Council.

The council voted 7-0 to accept a conceptual design for a variety of improvements to the busy roadway, including sidewalks, curbs and gutters, bike lanes and landscaping, between Vine Drive and the Hickory Street/Conifer Street intersection.

The council also approved moving \$1.8 million from funds once designated for pursuing a truck route north of the city to the improvement program. The addition brings the total available for the project to about \$8 million.

Completing the improvements would cost another \$4 million to \$7 million, officials said. City staff plans to pursue grants and other funding to narrow the gap.

The improvements are what city voters had in mind when they approved freeing up truck-route funds for transportation projects in north Fort Collins in 2006, council member Ben Marvel said.

"I can't think of a better use than the expediting of improvements to North College Avenue," he said.

The goal of the project is to improve safety on North College Avenue and to make it an attractive gateway to the city, officials said. The long-sought improvements have been pushed in recent years by area residents and the North Fort Collins Business Association.

Association member Mike Bello told council members the north side of Fort Collins has not received the same support as other areas during the years. Improving the road will help bring North Fort Collins "up to snuff," he said.

"I think we have a plan that really meets the needs of the North College business community," he said.

Doug Hay, a member of the business association, said major economic development projects are planned for North College — including a new King Soopers supermarket — that would benefit from the improvements.

The city is likely to see increased tax revenue as the economic development projects come on line, he said.

Following final design and right-of-way acquisition, construction on the improvements is expected to begin in 2011. Construction will be done in phases, with work beginning near Vine Drive and

proceeding north.

With the truck-route funding, improvements can be built from Vine Drive to Hemlock Street, officials said. When the improvements would be pushed to the Hickory/Conifer intersection depends on the availability of funding.

Additional Facts

By the numbers

North College Avenue improvements, Vine Drive to Conifer Street:

- > Total cost of proposed improvements: Between \$12 million and \$15 million
- > Funding available from city and state sources: \$6.2 million
- > Additional truck-route funding: \$1.8 million
- > Identified funding gap: Between \$4 million and \$7 million