

SCHENECTADY

Speakers back Upper Union streetscape plan

Merchants hope project includes more parking

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Gazette Reporter

Sondra Stephens is keeping her business in Schenectady, even when the city next year begins to rip out her sidewalks and close down one side of her street.

The work is part of a \$2.4 million streetscape project to improve pedestrian traffic in the busy upper

Union Street business district.

Stephens, owner of Sondra's Fine Jewelry, 1624 Union St., only hopes the city will add more parking spaces as part of the project, which is scheduled to take three years to complete. And she said she is willing to sacrifice gardens in front of her shop to create the parking spaces.

Stephens attended a public hearing on the streetscape project Wednesday night at the office of the Metroplex Development Authority. Metroplex, the city of Schenectady and the Upper Union Street Business Improvement District are paying for the streetscape project.

Phase one of the project begins this summer, at a cost of \$750,000.

The city and Metroplex are contributing \$350,000 and the BID \$40,000. The work involves repaving Union Street from Dean Street to the Niskayuna border and installing curb cuts, sidewalks, trees and new street lights along the route.

Phase two is scheduled to begin in 2010 and includes similar work from Union Street at Dean to Garner Avenue. The plan is to add additional parking in front of Gershon's Deli & Caterers, 1600 Union St. The work will cost \$17

million.

Five people attended the public hearing and all spoke in support of the project. Their only concern was that more parking be added in the business district.

Stephens said on-street parking will help local business owners who have to compete with malls and their abundant parking. She said she has been approached by mall owners to locate her 12-year-old business out of the county, but said she is committed to staying in Schenectady.

Iris Williams of Hulett Street said she was happy to see Union Street receive the attention but said she would also like to see Metroplex and the city do the same for businesses along Albany Street.

"I would like to see it get upgraded and would like to bring back businesses to Albany Street," Williams said. "I am representing the merchants here."

Williams is a member of ACORN, a grass roots community organization of low- and moderate-income people.