

SECTION B WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2009

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SCHENECTADY

Upper Union Street getting a boost

Area to see new
sidewalks, trees,
signs, parking

BY MICHAEL LAMENDOLA
Gazette Reporter

The upper Union Street business district will get a fresh new look this spring as part of a \$740,000 project.

A public hearing on the project will be held 6 p.m. today at the Metroplex Development Authority office on the fourth floor in Center City.

Metroplex and the city are each contributing \$350,000 and the Upper Union Street Business Improvement District is putting in \$40,000, which is coming from a state grant.

The project is scheduled to be done in phases over the next three years and to cost at least \$2.4 million to complete. Metroplex, the city and the BID will provide additional money for later phases based on financial availability.

Local merchants support the work.

"I have been lobbying for this project for about eight years," said Sondra Stephens of Sondra's Fine Jewelry, 1624 Union St. "We are trying to make it more like Saratoga.

"Everyone is waiting for [today] to see what they are going to do and how they will do it. I am all for it going forward as long as they have a plan about how they are going to handle parking, and I am interested in the time frame," Stevens said.

Metroplex Chairman Ray Gillen said the upper Union Street merchants have been pressing for the project for years.

"It is something they want. The business community came together and came to the city and us on it. This is taking upper Union Street to the next level and continuing the momentum there," he said.

Upper Union Street BID Chairman Guy Sementilli, of Scotti's Restaurant & Pizzeria at 1730 Union St., said the main focus of the project is to improve pedestrian traffic.

"We need proper curb cuts. The curbs are so outdated; we need a makeover."

The project will also improve signs, add road striping and increase parking spots, he said.

City Engineer Bernard Sisson said the first phase is to mill and repave Union Street from Dean Street to the city's boundary with Niskayuna and to install new curb cuts and sidewalks along the route. In addition, trees will be planted and new light fixtures installed, similar to those on Jay Street.

Union

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Sisson said the city will minimize disruption to vehicle and foot traffic by completing one side of the street at a time. The work will take approximately three months to complete.

"We take out one sidewalk, pour curbs and provide temporary access to businesses and residents. We do one side at a time. There will be some disruption," Sisson said.

The second phase is to perform similar work from Dean Street to Garner Avenue, Sisson said. This work may take two years to complete and would cost approximately \$1.7 million, he said.

As an alternative, the city will look at replacing material inside

the circle design at Union and Dean streets, Sisson said.

"We will cost it out and see how expensive it is to replace," he said.

Sisson said the city will pay its share through bonding. Metroplex receives revenues from a portion of the county sales tax.

Anthony Adonnino, past vice president of the Upper Union Street BID, said local merchants have been working on the project for four years.

"It is a reason I became a member of the BID. I know they spent a lot of time and resources on downtown, but they need to maintain, improve the upper Union Street area," he said. "It is something that is absolutely necessary."

Gillen said that approximately 600 people work in this area and the businesses there generate significant sales tax revenues for the county.

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