

South End project moving forward

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SPRINGFIELD - An engineering firm is proceeding with design and field work in the South End in advance of an estimated \$3.2 million Main Street revitalization project.

The firm, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin Inc., was hired by the city to analyze traffic conditions and generate construction documents for the Main Street corridor project, city officials said this week. The \$313,000 city-funded contract with Vanasse includes planning, engineering, design and related costs.

"We are excited to be moving beyond plans and into the field work," Mayor Domenic J. Sarno said. "The South End is important to the fabric of Springfield and we are committed to creating a better neighborhood for residents, businesses and visitors."

The city will advertise for construction bids soon, and work will begin by summer, officials said.

Joan B. Kagan, chairwoman of the South End Revitalization Coalition, joined in saying she was excited by the upcoming work, that includes road and sidewalk improvements, new crosswalks and lighting.

"The South End is a gateway to the city from the south," Kagan said. "It is rich in history and culture. I think there are many opportunities to revitalize the South End that will contribute to the overall economic development of Springfield."

She is president of chief executive officer of Square One, that has its administrative office and an early childhood center on Main Street.

The city has a mix of local, state and federal funds, as well as new grant applications to assist with long-term renovation plans in the South End, said Brian M. Connors, the city's acting chief development officer. The city is focusing on Main Street, with particular attention paid to the Hollywood and Marble Street areas.

In October, the city's Finance Control Board authorized \$6.2 million in capital bond funds for long-range urban renewal efforts in the South End.

The Urban Land Institute of Washington D.C., which evaluated economic development and neighborhood needs in the city, listed the South End as one of the top priorities in a 2007 report.

John Berchard, regional manager for Vanasse, said traffic counters have been installed at six locations along Main Street, that includes monitoring "turning movement traffic counts at the eight locations."

"This is just the beginning of a multi-faceted infrastructure project that will transform the South End," said Scott R. Hanson, principal planner for the city. "Improving the visual quality of this corridor and the front door for the many established businesses on Main Street is essential to improving the overall business climate in the city."