

Public Works backs Main Street lane reductions

Recommendation aims to make congested area atop hill more pedestrian-friendly

By John Sharp

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PEORIA —

Main Street's lanes from Bourland Avenue to Downtown would be reduced from five to three under a recommendation from the city's Public Works Department.

In addition, a center turn lane along Main Street west of the University Street intersection would be eliminated under a plan the city's staff will recommend to the City Council in either late October or early November.

Public Works Director David Barber and Kurt Bialobreski, a traffic engineer with Hanson Professional Services Inc., introduced the recommendation Monday during a public hearing before approximately 40 people at City Hall.

Aside from reducing lanes on Main Street, staff will not recommend any changes be made for the highly traveled and often congested Main and University intersection bordered by restaurants One World Eats & Drinks and Avanti's.

"If we eliminate one or two more lanes, we'll have traffic backed up significantly," Barber said. "What we don't want to do is put more traffic into your neighborhoods."

But some in the crowd thought that in order for the city to make the Main Street area in the West Bluff more pedestrian-friendly, more analysis needs to be done.

"The goal is to reduce the number of travel lanes and create an environment where (people) choose to walk," said Beth Akeson, a member of the city's Heart of Peoria Commission, whose members analyze ways to make the city's older neighborhoods more pedestrian-friendly. "(Right now) it's very unpleasant and not friendly."

Barber said if lanes were reduced, especially in the highly traveled area of Main Street from University to Farmington Road, it would result in more traffic on neighborhood streets.

Others in the crowd expressed concerns that the city's suggestions could increase the number of vehicles traveling upon residential streets.

For instance, under the city's suggestion, the number of vehicles traveling on Columbia Terrace east of University increases by 1,000 each day.

Second District Councilwoman Barbara Van Auken said the two "schools of thought" of leaving Main Street the same or further reducing it will be considered before the City Council votes on the recommendations.

In addition, the council will likely be asked to approve \$75,000 in the 2009 budget for further studies on streetscape improvements and other ways to make Main Street more pedestrian-friendly.

Efforts of calming traffic along Main Street are the result of the city's formation in 2006 of form districts - which, among other areas of the city, includes Main Street - that takes into account the ideas of making streets more friendly to people who walk or bike.

The city's suggestion comes after Hanson completed a series of computer-modeled traffic tests.

The company was hired in February for \$52,259 to study the area around Main Street, and the many neighborhood streets that branch away from it. They used traffic counts, travel speeds, accident counts, population data, employment information and the types of trips people make through the area to help determine what the city should consider for its options along Main.

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