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Monaca planning for arrival of Shell plant by pursuing \$5 million streetscape project

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Submitted

Seen above are preliminary schematic designs for a roundabout at 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue that could be installed as part of the Monaca Gateway Project.

MONACA -- The arrival of Shell Chemicals Co. in nearby Potter Township could have big ramifications for Monaca, which is why borough officials are planning for the future in the form of a significant streetscape and traffic improvement project.

Borough Manager Mario Leone said the overall project could cost about \$5 million, although the plans are so preliminary that monetary estimates are likely to change. The project is officially called the Monaca Gateway Project.

Officials are working to determine the scope of the project, but preliminary schematics plan for massive improvements on Pennsylvania Avenue between Ninth and 17th streets.

That includes traffic light improvements, the potential installation of a roundabout near 17th, sidewalk improvements and landscaping alterations. The improvements would take place on about a half-mile stretch down the main street of Monaca.

With Shell Chemicals' arrival in Beaver County, as well as other road improvements in the area, Leone said it's important to plan for the future now.

"We're advocating that Monaca is the center and hub of all traffic in Beaver County," he said. "With the new cracker plant, the amount of traffic that will come down through the Route 18 corridor is going to increase. Same thing with the Crows Run corridor that will increase traffic from Cranberry. Planning for those, we need to do some traffic enhancements."

The improvements will be practical and aesthetic, Leone said. The borough is going to make a concerted effort to go "green" in terms of storm-water management, which could entail parking lots made of brick instead of pavement to allow for better water seepage into the ground.

Officials would also install all new sidewalks and make all crosswalks wheelchair-accessible. There would also be new street lights, "decorative ornamental lighting" and new landscaping alongside the road, Leone said.

In addition, Leone said the borough will incorporate signage to make people aware of the nearby Ohio River biking trail. If more people know about the trail, they might stop in Monaca to patronize local businesses, he said.

While plenty of things are being planned, residents shouldn't expect to see any improvements anytime soon. Leone said the borough is planning to have designs and schematics complete by the fall of 2017.

That's mostly because Columbia Gas is planning for a major upgrade of its infrastructure system in Monaca by replacing aging gas lines. That work is expected to start in the spring.

It makes no sense, Leone said, to do all sorts of improvements on the surface, only for Columbia Gas to come in and rip it up in order to do underground work.

Another potential project could also change the scope of the project. Borough officials are still in touch with Sheetz, which previously expressed interest in building a gas station on the site of the current Monaca municipal building.

If that project would come to fruition, it would require significant infrastructure improvements on Pennsylvania Avenue near Ninth.

Regardless, the improvements are coming, and they will be thoroughly planned and executed, he said.

"We want to make (the streetscape) attractive to people who are coming through Monaca, so they want to stop and shop," Leone said. "But it's also to move people through the borough in a safe and timely manner."

Borough officials are working to secure funding for the project. That includes a \$1.5 million grant in the form of federal Housing and Urban Development funding through a community-development program.

The borough is also seeking a \$2.9 million grant through the state Department of Community and Economic Development.