

'Found' money will speed up downtown project

By Jeanne Davant

Additional funding from the Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments will allow Manitou Springs to complete the downtown improvements project along Manitou Avenue two years sooner than expected.

Planning Director Dan Folke said the agency's board approved additional funding of more than \$133,000 for the last phase of the project at its Dec. 8 meeting.

The city is now getting \$1.1 million to complete Phase 5B of the project, which covers the area from Ruxton Avenue to Park Avenue.

"They 'found' extra money in the Metro fund, a category of federal highway dollars," Folke said. The money, which amounted to some \$6 million, was left over from projects that didn't get done or came in under budget.

The city will get the funds this year instead of having them spread out over the next three years as- originally planned. That will allow completion of the project before the summer of 2012, Finance Director Mike Leslie said.

Phase 5B includes undergrounding utilities, widening of sidewalks and addition of "amenity zones," street furniture, landscaping, wheelchair-accessible crosswalks and an enhanced entrance to Soda Springs Park. The design and materials will match the pedestrian-friendly streetscape in the downtown area.

Leslie said the plan for improving the park entrance does not include replacing the old metal pedestrian bridge across Fountain Creek. That project might be added, however, and paid for with money designated for park and recreation improvements.

The 5B plan also includes another roundabout at Park Avenue, but that's being looked at closely, given that the first roundabout appears to have contributed to last summer's traffic problems.

Leslie said the matching funds Manitou is required to provide for the project will come from money the city gets from the Pikes Peak Rural Transportation Authority.

"We had \$600,000 left in RTA capital funds," Leslie said. "We were looking to spend about \$400,000 of that on Phase 5B. Now we're going to have to spend only about \$300,000."

Leslie said some of the leftover RTA money could be used to retrofit the original roundabout.

"I've talked to engineers about it, and it's functioning as designed," Folke said. "We're looking at ways to alleviate traffic when it's backed up." Folke put in a request for funds to do that when he heard PPACG had found the extra \$6 million, but the agency decided not to fund any new projects.

Leslie is working with Nolte Associates, the project manager, on ways to improve traffic flow near the roundabout.

"We're kind of a victim of our own success," Leslie said, adding that Streets Department Director Bruno Pothier "has lots of experience with roundabouts in Europe, and they're experiencing the same thing. We're looking at what they're doing."

Leslie said he hopes to have the gridlock problem solved by next summer. One solution being considered is a signal that would activate when traffic at the roundabout reaches a certain level. Leslie also is planning to propose legislation to City Council that would address parking in the center lane of Manitou Avenue.

"One of the problems is that nobody had the ability to pass anybody trying to park because the center lane was full of delivery vehicles," Leslie said. Besides creating gridlock, that poses a public safety issue, since the center lane is supposed to be accessible for emergency vehicles.

Leslie anticipates that the Phase SB improvements will go out for bids in September. Construction would begin in January 2012 and would be completed in about five months.

Although funds are available, the start of the project has to wait until Colorado Springs Utilities can schedule trenching for undergrounding the utilities.

[Return to Article Index](#)