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Sidewalk Facelift Inching Down the Boulevard

By Cathy Tyson



Photo Cathy Tyson

Here a brick, there a brick. Although the project can't march along fast enough for Mt. Diablo merchants, Lafayette pedestrians can actually walk on the new and vastly improved sidewalk in front of the Round Up Saloon down to Amarin Thai and a bit beyond. The progress continues westward as the contractor, McGuire Hester, deals with a few delays in the process.

As expected there have been some slight bumps in the road, or rather sidewalk, rather like finding unanticipated dry rot in a home remodel. Unbeknownst to everyone, the PG & E and A T & T lines were not buried deep enough when the original sidewalks were installed in the 1950's and 1960's. Fixing that set the timeline back a bit. Just last Thursday, an abandoned natural gas line that was not marked on the contractors plans was bent, causing a leak in the 3500 block of Mt. Diablo Boulevard that closed the road. Finally, although the weather has been cooperating lately, there had been a few delays for rain, said Senior Engineer Farzaneh Sanders. "We've been fairly lucky, just a couple of weeks behind at this point," she said.

Who's paying for all this, and what about spending the money on pothole repair instead? Federal Grant funds that are managed by CalTrans are paying for 80% of the \$1.69 million dollar upgrade. The City is required to contribute a 20% match. Originally money was set aside from the Downtown Streetlight Replacement Reserve to spruce up just one block on Mt. Diablo Boulevard; by obtaining the grant, they were able to leverage municipal funds substantially. The grant, however, comes with strings attached - it can only be used on the sidewalk beautification project, not for road maintenance.

Kind of like the pyramids of Egypt, only shorter and much less triangular, a low stone wall in front of Diablo Foods is in the preliminary stages of being erected. The idea was to visually separate the parking lot from drivers on the Boulevard and make it more attractive with the addition of greenery. Vines will ultimately cover the parking lot side of the wall. In front of Trader Joe's, because existing trees have very shallow roots, the stone wall was nixed in favor of a substantial metal fence with decorative panels.

Landscaping is the final component of the job, estimated to be complete in June. Look for the yellow caution tape around areas where future shrubs will go. City staff wish to remind drivers to slow down and have a little extra patience, especially around workers, equipment and traffic. For the latest news on the Downtown Pedestrian, Bicycle and Streetscape Improvements Project, go to the city website at www.lovelafayette.com and scroll down to "Road and Street Work Updates."

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