

Canal plans on the move in Holyoke

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HOLYOKE - City officials are ready to design the second phase of the canal walk, now that the first part is ready for construction.

City planners expect to meet next month with the state Highway Department to map out the next part of the walk, which will run parallel to the first, said Kathleen G. Anderson, economic development director, on Friday.

The city has received \$5 million worth of federal grants to erect a 15-foot-wide brick walkway, complete with plantings, along the city's canals. The Highway Department is overseeing the project.

The second phase is to run between Appleton and Dwight streets along the lower canal, and essentially will make a square with the first phase. This will run between the same two streets on the upper canal, said Anderson.

"We think this will go a lot easier," she said. "Holyoke G&E (Gas and Electric) owns a lot of property on the canal, and one property owner who has already signed off on one side owns land there, too."

One reason it has taken almost 10 years to get the first phase started was that property owners were at times reluctant to sign an easement allowing the walk to be constructed on their land.

In fact, a portion of what is now dubbed Phase 1B, which runs from Lyman Street to Dwight Street, has been permanently put on hold. This, said Anderson, is because one property owner has not permitted the easement, while another is considering renovations near the walk.

Construction on the first phase of the project is expected to cost \$716,445. Gomes Construction Co. of Ludlow, the low bidder, is scheduled to commence work in the spring.

There is no funding estimate on the second phase, but Anderson said she is hopeful that it could start in the following spring.

If the Highway Department agrees to let the project move ahead, four public hearings will be called.

"We are looking forward to it; hopefully, that will bring people downtown," said Bruce C. Fowler, an artist who has converted a vacant building on Race Street into studios. Another artist bought the building next door for the same purpose.

The second phase of the walk will run next to Fowler's building, which will eventually house a cafe, restaurant, and art gallery.

Fowler and his business partner were so enthusiastic about the second phase of the walk that they created the Friends of the Canal Walk to support city efforts.

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