

# 1st Street construction to begin its final phase

By Larry Andersen

Even though the Illinois Street Bridge is closed, and will be until May 11, the City's engineering department is planning and preparing for the final phase of the 1st Street utility construction.

The Monday following the opening of the Illinois Street Bridge, Illinois Route 31 will be closed to traffic for utility work to be completed.

"This really signals the final phase of the utility work with Benchmark Construction," said City Engineer Greg Chismark.

Chismark said that originally the contract to do work on Route 31 was to happen 24 hours a day, seven days a week. He added that the continuous noise from tools, machines, and warning beeps on tractors would be a major distraction to residents and business owners in downtown.

"If all that happened all night long, that would not go over well with some residents and businesses like the Hotel Baker," Chismark said.

Instead of the 24-hour work day that was expected, Benchmark will bring in extra crews which will work twelve hours a day, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

"It will still be a seven-day operation," Chismark said.

When construction starts on Route 31, no traffic will be allowed on the street, except for a single southbound lane.

"Southbound traffic on 31 would be able to continue," Chismark said. "Northbound traffic will be detoured, but southbound traffic will be able to get through."

The work will be done in sections, starting at the intersection of Indiana Street and Route 31. The utility work is expected to take about a week to

complete before moving to the intersection of Illinois Street and Route 31 where the intersection is expected to be closed for a week. Work will then move northward to near the intersection of Walnut Street and Route 31, and, again, the work is expected to take about one week for completion.

"This is the final phase and we are looking forward to this being over," Chismark said.

The city also has paved the northern section of 1st Street since the asphalt plants have opened for the season. The stretch of street was left as gravel after utility work was completed about three weeks ago because of the cost it would take to temporarily pave the street in concrete since asphalt was not available.

The city also constructed a makeshift parking lot to alleviate parking frustrations by paving a gravel lot along 1st Street between Indiana and Illinois streets. The lot has been striped to provide almost 50 additional parking spaces in downtown.

Superintendent of Public Works Mark Koenen said the parking lot is intended to help when other parking lots in the downtown area are taken up with construction traffic and material when the proposed buildings for the renovation project start going up.

He said a building is proposed on the site where the city developed the makeshift parking lot, but construction on that building will take place later in the restoration project.

"When the building starts on that property, the parking deck will be up," Koenen said.

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He said the building that is proposed where the city developed the makeshift parking lot is not scheduled to start until the parking deck is finished.

The largest building in terms of space and loss of parking spaces will be the building of the parking deck. Koenen said the city is doing all it can to make parking in downtown St. Charles as accessible as possible.

"There will be some parking on the northwest corner of 1st Street during the building of the parking deck," he said.