

WEST FARGO

Sheyenne Street project comes in over estimate, will move forward

Finance Director Jim Larson said after receiving the much higher bills, staff worked to pull money from elsewhere to avoid raising the amount of special assessments that would be used.

Written By: Wendy Reuer | Dec 7th 2020 - 8pm.



Motorists drive down northern Sheyenne Street in West Fargo. David Samson / The Pioneer

A plan to reconstruct northern Sheyenne Street will cost nearly \$1 million more than the city of West Fargo originally planned.

Since 2019, the city has been discussing the project that includes replacing underground utilities, narrowing the existing roadway, widening side paths, slowing traffic, reducing access locations, building curb extensions and bulb-outs, improving lighting and installing streetscaping components.

City Engineer Dustin Scott estimated the total cost to be around \$6.7 million, which would include planning and construction costs. But, when bids were opened on Nov. 13, they ranged from roughly \$7.5 million to \$8.5 million with Dakota Underground submitting the lowest bid.

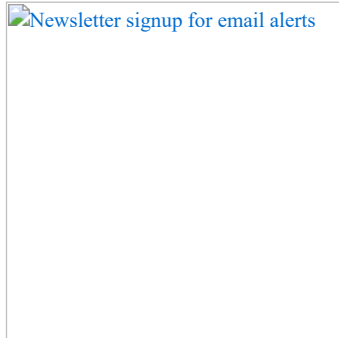
"Unfortunately, we did have a pretty significant discrepancy between the bids and where the engineering estimates were," Scott said. "Our engineering estimates were undervalued, primarily due to the complex nature of this project. These bids are not bad, there is just a discrepancy."

To help pay for the project, the city received a \$2.4 million grant from the state as part of its Main Street program, which would help pay for the reconstruction of the road.



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The city then planned to use sales tax and about \$1.822 million of special assessments toward for the project.

Assessments would be used for sewer, water and storm sewer. Assessments would not be used for any street improvements, Scott said.

The city planed to use about \$1.4 million in sales tax money and \$1 million of water revenue and sewer bond funds.

The improvement district for the project would include properties from Main Avenue to Seventh Avenue and from Sheyenne River to Drain 45 to the east.

Finance Director Jim Larson said, after receiving the much higher bills, staff worked to pull money from elsewhere to avoid raising the amount of special assessments that would be used.

"The \$1.8 million — we have not changed that, we have stayed at that level," Larson said Monday.

He said about \$1.25 million in sales tax could be used, and the city would be able to use state-granted Prairie Dog funds to help with the project.

"Prairie Dog funds are about \$2.5 million to the city, and they would use \$1 million of those funds to this project," Larson said. "Our goal is to stabilize the special assessments and not bring them up."

Despite the larger price tag, City Administrator Tina Fisk said the best time to do this project would be now rather than down the road.

"These underlying water, sewer and storm issues are not going away; they have to be done," she said. "So if we can wrap it into this grant, that is about the best scenario we can hope for to keep special assessments down."

Although businesses in the area are concerned about retaining customers during construction, they say they would prefer the city move forward with the project.

Nicole Dutton, president of The Yards Business Association, formerly known as the Downtown Business Association, said business owners in the area would prefer the project be finished sooner rather than later. She said although many of the businesses are still new to the area and trying to grow, the area needs to undergo this process to help move development along.

"The area in itself needs more of a downtown feel," Dutton said. "Yes, it will impact us."

Dutton said the project would also help combat recent issues of an overwhelmed system such as the corner of Sheyenne and Second Avenue being flooded. The basement of the Sheyenne Plaza was partially flooded recently due to a heavy rain.

"Everybody definitely is on board with the construction," Dutton said. "They feel it's a means to an end to making our downtown special."

She added the key will be helping communicate to residents so customers can access the businesses during construction.

Commissioner Brad Olson said doing this project would help businesses and increase the possibility of boosting sales tax collections in the future.

"I just feel getting the information out prior to these projects is very important," Commissioner Mandy George said. "Now is the time to say something versus when it's all done."

"During the process, there were a number of meetings held, and we had a great turnout for the design process," Mayor Bernie Dardis said.

The City Commission unanimously approved awarding the \$7.5 million bid Monday, Dec. 7, to Dakota Underground.

The project will begin construction this spring and finish next fall, Scott said.