



Date of Council Meeting: January 13, 2014

TOWN OF LEESBURG TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

Subject: Communications and Construction Mitigation Plan for the Downtown Improvement Project

Staff Contact: Scott E. Parker, AICP, Assistant Town Manager

Background: Currently, staff is actively working on Phase IIA of the Downtown Improvement Project. This part of the project is centered on Loudoun Street from King Street to Church Street. Phase IIB and C, which will commence next, will focus on Loudoun Street from Church Street to the East End Triangle and will run through the summer of 2014. Phase III of the project, which is the King Street portion of the project, could start construction in spring of 2014, beginning with the “replacement in kind” maintenance work (curb, gutter, brick) on the east side of King Street, similar to the Loudoun Street work currently underway. Construction of the portions of the project that require new design work will likely start construction in spring of 2015.

Since the inception of the project, staff has realized that the concentration and diversity of businesses along King Street would require an aggressive effort to produce and maintain communication and support for the businesses affected by the construction of the improvements. The current phases of the project, as well as the completed Phase IA and IB projects (East End Triangle, alley and walkways to King Street), has successfully managed impacts to existing businesses by actively and effectively communicating critical construction information and providing guidance to a high level of personal interaction.

King Street, however, provides a unique set of circumstances that will require an “all hands on deck” approach by a number of departments in Town. Staff’s current “hands on” approach will still be a core part of a plan going forward, but the scope will need to be increased when construction moves to King Street. One of the main practices with our current phases of the project has been the targeted phasing of construction in order to minimize impacts. For example, we have worked around First Friday, and we have spoken with businesses about their hours of operation in order to work around their schedules. This will also be a cornerstone of the King Street portion of the project.

Many communities have gone through similar experiences with downtown revitalization projects. However, each community that has undertaken a construction project such as ours is unique and brings to the table a unique set of issues. To effectively address this challenge, staff will employ outside expertise from both the Leesburg community and outside the region. Staff will utilize outside expertise to capture applicable lessons learned from those other communities, and local expertise will be utilized that is familiar with our specific issues.

Current Activities:

Through the first phases of construction, Town staff has employed a variety of strategies that have now begun to be discussed and employed in advance of King Street construction. Some of these include:

- One-on-one outreach to businesses to identify specific needs
- Regular e-mail updates
- Regular discussions with leaders of the LDBA
- Discussions with EDC
- Targeted and phased construction (such as coordinating with Cajun Experience and Bull Run on Loudoun Street to accommodate night business and meetings)
- Directional signage.

Marketing Plan:

There will be four areas of focus for our concentrated marketing efforts for the Communications and Construction Mitigation Plan:

- Continuation of successful one-on-one communication and accessibility of Town staff related to daily construction activities.
- Concerted effort on outside of the area media to show we are “open for business.”
- Marketing and advertising campaigns and special business events which the individual businesses can participate in during construction.
- Attention to the benefits of investment in downtown infrastructure.

The following is a preliminary outline of the specific tasks related to the Communications and Construction Mitigation Plan:

Project Kick Off and Information Gathering

Meetings with key stakeholders to understand the project scope, schedule, and organizational structure.

Draft Marketing Material Graphic Development

Development of a graphic package for the Loudoun/King Street construction project that will include, at a minimum, the following:

- Project Signs
- Print Media Ads/ Business Marketing
- Project Messaging
- Information Brochures for Businesses, Stakeholders, and Citizens
- Email Templates and Social Media Templates
- Web Page Design
- Other Collateral as needed (table tents, posters, banners, etc.) This item is open-ended as most projects have a list of 10-14 deliverable items.

Draft Public Outreach and Communication Plan

Development of a comprehensive public outreach and communication plan that will involve coordination among the Town of Leesburg, downtown stakeholders, and the construction firm involved in the project. The plan will include the following:

- “In the street” communication that will involve signing, temporary way-finding and additional communication to help customers and citizens navigate through downtown.
 - Community messaging program including regular meeting schedules and creative ideas for ongoing communication, such as “breakfast with the contractor” during construction.
 - Digital and social media campaign including Facebook, Twitter, and web-based communication.
 - Media campaign including print ads, posters, signs, brochures.
- For each item in the Public Outreach and Communication Plan, a detailed implementation strategy will include responsible parties, timelines, communication techniques, and estimated budget allocation.

The project is scheduled to begin in February of 2014.

Business Assistance:

In addition to the Downtown Marketing Plan, Town staff has reached out to the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to enlist their assistance to individual businesses. They have responded enthusiastically to our request to be a partner to our efforts to support the downtown businesses. The SBDC can provide business counseling, help with business strategy, bring in merchandising experts, help businesses develop frequent shopper or shop local programs and provide other direct assistance to business owners. As a non-government partner, the SBDC can provide a bridge to a vast array of available business assistance resources. Town staff will also reach out to the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce and the Loudoun County Department of Economic Development as additional partners or resources.

Town staff has held discussions with the LDBA’s leadership, as well as representatives of the Leesburg EDC to discuss strategy and activities that could be incorporated into the plan. We all realize that keeping businesses engaged and offering them support is an integral part of any strategy. Some of the ideas that have been mentioned as having a part in the overall plan include such activities as red carpets across the construction areas, a “hard hat” photo campaign of businesses owners (in hard hats), and business giveaways. In addition, staff will be looking into the temporary relaxation of signage rules during construction, and any other regulatory measures that may assist us in our goal.