

MAIN LINE TIMES

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LM releases proposed CIP; budget release set for Friday

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Lower Merion officials have released the first of two budget documents that will shape township spending in 2011, and the second, more comprehensive one will be available by the end of the week.

On Oct. 29, the township released its proposed 2011-2016 Capital Improvement Program.

The Township Manager's Proposed 2011 Budget was to have been available the same day, but its release was pushed back to Friday, Nov. 5.

The budget document should be available on the township Web site at www.lowermerion.org late Friday afternoon and at library branches over the weekend.

The five-year capital-spending plan, which is also available for review on the Web site at www.lowermerion.org/Index.aspx?page+1116, represents a total of \$157 million in projects, with \$28.3 million for 46 projects scheduled in 2011.

As Township Manager Douglas Cleland predicted in workshops on the CIP this summer, it is a "constrained" plan compared to some previous years, with few new projects proposed.

The most significant projects over the five years, in terms of township funding, continue to be the \$25-million library-renovation and expansion program that began this year with improvements to Ludington Library in Bryn Mawr.

With \$3.1 million spent in 2010, another \$5.4 million for the Ludington renovation is requested for 2011, when construction is expected to be completed. The next project in line, at the Bala Cynwyd Library, which may go to bids for construction early in 2011, would see \$3.3 million in spending next year, with another \$4.5 million in 2012. Projects at the other four libraries would see funding in 2012 through 2015.

Other major projects in 2011

would include scheduled road milling and paving (\$1million), stormwater-management projects (\$675,000), streetscape improvements for Bala Avenue (\$1.6 million) and City Avenue (\$85,000), and completion of the Anderson Avenue underpass-improvement project on which work got under way last month (\$875,000.)

In an interview this week, Cleland and Public Works Director Don Cannon said there have been few changes since staff presented preliminary information about capital projects in June and again in September.

For the past three years, the board of commissioners has reviewed potential capital projects in these workshops, categorizing projects by priority as essential, desirable and ones that could be scheduled later in the five-year plan.

"We have pushed a few projects farther out ... that we can move forward or backward if grant money becomes available or if priorities change," Cleland said.

Referring to the workshops, Cleland said, "We have spent much more time working with the board and the public" in recent years. "I think we have landed on a good system of categorizing projects and found a good place in terms of what can be delayed and why."

Cannon noted that, comparing the 2011-2016 plan to the five-year schedule brought forward at this time last year, total spending is reduced by \$6.3 million. He said that has been accomplished "mostly by shifting work and looking at priorities."

In addition to the library projects, some major projects are scheduled in outer years of the plan. They include improvements connected with the Ardmore Transit Center and projects recommended in the Bryn Mawr Master Plan drawn up several years ago.

The long-awaited transit-center project is seen as moving ahead with engineering and design in 2011, with major spending for construction coming in 2012 and 2013. Between 2011 and 2014 \$35.6 million is scheduled for the project.

It will move ahead, Cleland cautioned, "as we work through the key components of [addressing] funding gaps and zoning and land-development issues."

Cleland said design and engineering for the public part of the project – primarily a new train station and commuter-parking garage – is nearing the 45-percent design stage.

While there has been little public activity on the transit-center plans for some months,

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LM releases proposed CIP for 2011-2016

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Another key decision will be coming up in the early part of 2011, Cleland said. That is when the Bala Cynwyd Library project will reach the 50-percent design phase, triggering an independent estimate of construction costs. When that has been completed, he said, the board of commissioners will decide whether to proceed to the construction-bidding process.

Cleland said bids were opened last week for construction of Phase I of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail, with bids from nine contractors received. The project should come forward in

December for award of contracts, he said. Just under \$2 million is budgeted for the project in 2011, much of it from grant sources.

Of the projects that are moving up or new for 2011, the Bala Avenue streetscape improvements, being planned with the City Avenue Special Services District, would involve new sidewalks, landscaping, crosswalks and four-way stop signs to calm traffic and improve pedestrian safety, as well as new streetlighting.

In connection with proposed rezoning in the City Avenue corridor, the township has begun to establish a Transportation Services Area for

the district, which could mean transportation-impact fees on developers. In anticipation of road and intersection improvements that may be proposed, the CIP pencils in \$1.2 million over the five years for potential projects.

Public hearings on the 2011-2016 Capital Improvement Program, as well as the Proposed 2011 Township Budget, are scheduled for Nov. 17 at 7:30 p.m. and Dec. 1 at 7 p.m. at the Township Building, 75 E. Lancaster Ave., Ardmore.

The board of commissioners will vote to adopt a budget and capital program on Dec. 15.