

News

Bridge repairs could be 'brutal' to businesses

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By Michael Hays, mhays@pottsmmerc.com

LOWER POTTS GROVE — Beginning some time in April, a well-traversed High Street bridge will likely be closed for three months, according to township officials.

Several township commissioners were adamant during Monday's meeting about the project's potential negative impact on surrounding businesses. Cutillo's Restaurant & Lounge is one of several establishments that could suffer, Commissioner James Phillips said.

"That's just going to kill the businesses in that area," he said. "This is going to be brutal."

A PennDOT project manager outlined the structure's weaknesses last summer. The Sanatoga bridge has a leaning northwest wall and minor cracks throughout. Vehicles veering onto the High Street shoulder as they approach the bridge may fall over the side, due to the barrier being as low as 6 inches in spots, according to a consultant with Traffic Planning & Design Inc.

Peter Mazzeo, a project manager with PennDOT, predicted last year that these improvements would occur in late 2009 or 2010. However, Township Manager Rodney Hawthorne confirmed last night that construction should begin in April.

At this time, it appears that both lanes will be closed, necessitating a detour. Scott Exley, president of Bursich Associates Inc. and the township engineer, said PennDOT prefers to redirect drivers onto state-owned roads.

This could mean a detour back down Route 422 and onto Armand Hammer Boulevard. Exley called the requirements a "PennDOT animal."

Commissioners' Chairman Bruce Foltz also expressed displeasure, but added there isn't much that Lower

Pottsgrove can do. He later hinted at potential traffic problems in the event the Limerick Generating Station is evacuated.

The bridge is a key access route connecting to the Exelon nuclear plant in neighboring Limerick, as well as Pottstown Memorial Medical Center and Montgomery County Community College.

Everyday, an average of 18,000 vehicles cross the Sanatoga Creek overpass, according to Traffic Planning & Design.

Last summer, the commissioners and several residents asked PennDOT to leave one lane open for vehicles during construction. Consultants said doing so could jeopardize structural integrity, and delay the project.

An emergency bridge repair in 2004 resulted in lost sales for area businesses, according to Phillips. He owns a car dealership in the township.

From an emergency services standpoint, Police Chief Michael Shade said the 2004 shutdown was “not that big of a deal,” although he predicted longer response times this spring.

In a related matter, the township will have to make \$5,000 in improvements to a bridge on Sunnybrook Road, at the direction of PennDOT. This work will need to be completed by June.

Last month, Hawthorne asked Exley to push the project back because funds were not budgeted for this improvement in 2009.

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