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Old Town, new look

By: Nathan Donato-Weinstein, The Press-Tribune

It's the oldest part of town, appearing not much different than it has for the past 100 years. But now, Old Town Roseville is well on its way to a new look.

Two long-awaited projects currently under construction are giving a fresh feel to the historic district, bounded by Main Street to the north, Pacific Street to the south, Washington Boulevard to the west and Lincoln Street to the east.

The goal is to improve the area's aesthetics and provide enhanced, pedestrian-friendly amenities, making getting around by foot easier and more inviting, city officials said.

"When people drive into the historic district once everything is up, it's gonna seem like just a totally different place," said Mark Wolinski, project manager for the Historic Old Town Streetscape and Infrastructure Improvement Project.

Under construction since October, the \$9.4 million project envisions, among other improvements:

n A striking plaza at the district's main entrance.

n Enhanced sidewalks, landscaping, lighting and seating.

n Eye-catching structures, including a rail yard viewing platform, clock and water tower to draw people in.



Pico Van Houtryve/THE PRESS-TRIBUNE Natalie Mendoza of Roseville walks her bike through the Washington Bou-levard Underpass, where Neson Baligod applies some finishing tile to the wall. C&C Construction worker Jose Carrillo fixes a roto hammer, top left, as cement workers Oscar Olguin, Nick Bozza and Mark Try, left to right, work on the new sidewalk outside of the McRae Block Building in Historic Roseville.

Also currently under way is a revamp of the Washington Boulevard Pedestrian Underpass, estimated to cost about \$600,000.

That project promises a more appealing link between Old Town and Downtown, with new wall treatments, lighting and entryways.

"What we did is make it warmer and much more inviting," said Bill Aiken, the underpass project's manager.

While Old Town's new streetscape won't be completed until late this year, it is already bearing some fruit. More than two-thirds of the planned antique-feel lighting has been installed, major stretches of sidewalk are in and work on utility lines is finishing up. Aboveground power lines are also being buried, reducing visual clutter and making equipment more reliable.

Those types of under-the-surface improvements are particularly important if the city is to realize its goals of attracting to the district new business and residential development, which requires modern utility infrastructure.

"Right now, anybody who owns property right there, they have a sewer, water and electricity system that they can connect directly to, and it's all brand new, greater capacity," Wolinski said.

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The projects are the outgrowth the City Council's decision in 1995 to make Downtown - including Old Town - revitalization a major focus. Funds for the streetscape project come from sources including redevelopment bonds, community development block grants, Roseville Electric and the Placer County Transportation and Planning Agency.

Local business owners said they welcomed the changes, despite the temporary headaches associated with the project.

Maria Sandoval, owner of Custom Threads, recently relocated her Old Town custom embroidery business a few doors down from her old location when she needed to expand.

"We wanted to stay in this area because there's so much going on," said Sandoval, whose shop at 312 Lincoln St. received a major overhaul. "It's almost a San Francisco feeling of old-time shops. The area's going to be beautiful when they're done with it."

John Bravo, co-owner of Down Under Construction at 327 Lincoln St., has lived in the area for decades. He said the increased visibility the project should bring would help put the area on the radar.

"The work going on doesn't really affect my business, because I'm not in retail, but as a person who lives in this are,a it's a good thing," he said. "There's a lot of people who don't know anything about Old Town Roseville, and some people don't even know how to get here."

Business law attorney Jack Duran represents the type of entrepreneur the city would like to attract to Old Town.

He considered moving into Class A office space on the new side of town when he started his own law firm. Instead, he opened shop earlier this year in the McCray building at 108 Main St., right in the heart of Old Town.

"Right now, the whole area is going through a revitalization, so for me it has that connection to the past, and also a participation in the future," Duran, who owns Duran Law Office, said. "For me, there's something about the history of this town."

Also under way is a makeover of the intersection of Main, Church and Lincoln streets. Decorative stamped concrete, a clock tower and seating on a sidewalk "bulb-out" should make the intersection into a signature focal point and gathering spot.

The rail yard viewing platform, a wooden structure under construction at Pacific and Lincoln streets, will give a 5-foot boost to look out over the tracks. The idea arose out of discussion with Old Town stakeholders on how to integrate the district's location into design plans, Wolinski said.

"When you're stand on the platform, it's amazing what 5 feet does," Wolinski said. "You have the whole view of the yard, and when trains go by, the conductors sit 15 feet from the rail to top of the cab."

Meanwhile, work on the underpass project, which is being funded by a Federal Highway Administration grant and city redevelopment funds, began May 31 and will finish up within the next 60 days, officials said.

The most visible aspect of the project is a shiny new tile finish along the underpass wall. Workers began applying the tiles May 31 and had completed a large portion of the underpass last week.

Project Manager Bill Aiken described the tile design, highly visible from the roadway below, as a color-filtering pattern.

"Every 25 feet or so there's a burst of color, and in between a flow of color, so it creates a really interesting environment," he said.

Soon, workers will begin adding a decorative roof above the walkway, and underpass lighting will get an update as well. Stamped concrete at the Pacific Street undercrossing will be installed, and decorative street lighting will be placed at the Church Street entry.

Aiken said the improvements are designed not only to give the walkway a facelift, but also to increase awareness about its existence, with directional signage at either end.

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"We want it to be as connected as possible, because the community vision is a real pedestrian oriented environment," he said.

Old Town revamp

What: \$9.4 million pro-ject to upgrade street-scape, infrastructure

Highlights: Rail yard viewing platform, new sidewalks and seating, undergrounding of power lines, sewer modernization

Washington Underpass project

What: \$590,000 project to enhance walkway connection between Old Town and Downtown Vernon Street Highlights: New tile finish along walkway wall, new lighting along walkway, decorative lighting at entrances, directional signage at underpass entries

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