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WORCESTER - Residents at a public hearing Wednesday night commended the state for tweaking aspects of the planned redesign of Main Street downtown, but still had suggestions to fine-tune the project.

The \$8.5 million to \$9.5 million project, largely funded by federal dollars, includes upgrades to 11 existing traffic signals, 5-foot bike lanes in both directions, pavement milling and resurfacing, and wheelchair ramp improvements. The most drastic change people will see in 2018 when the project is done will be a reduction from four travel lanes to two, with turning cutouts at intersections.

Streetscape elements will be incorporated, and the sidewalks will be reconstructed. At the hearing Wednesday, in the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission's Union Station offices, Jacob Sanders of the office of City Manager Edward M. Augustus Jr., said the manager considers the project a priority for the city. The project's current scope includes Main Street from around Madison Street to Thomas Street. Mr. Sanders said the city has plans to use a \$2.3 million state grant to extend the work to Chandler Street to the south and to Highland Street to the north. He said there are also plans to incorporate public art into the completed project.

Jerry Powers of WalkBike Worcester said that overall, the project is a step forward for the city; he said it's a plan that increases safety for all users.

"This is going to transform Main Street," he said.

At past hearings residents and business owners decried the elimination of parking spots, particularly the after-hours parking from Front Street to Foster Street, to accommodate the new design. William McGrath of Beta Engineering said since the last hearing, parking across from City Hall has been added, reducing the net number of lost spots. He said today there are 107 parking spots along the stretch; after the project is done, there will be 90.

The bi-level sidewalks planned for the project - which can be seen in finished form along Front Street across from the Common - allow engineers to correct for steep slopes and help bring the project into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, but have drawn the ire of residents and business owners. Mr. McGrath said the latest design reduces the amount of bi-level sidewalks from 3,200 linear feet to 1,200 linear feet.



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