

Danger zones? Not with new sidewalks

By John Davis; 4:24 p.m. EST January 17, 2014



(Photo: Spencer Ainsley/Poughkeepsie Jou, Spencer Ainsley/Poughkeepsie Journal)

HYDE PARK – The town boasts historic sites and restaurants that draw international tourists, but walking around Hyde Park can be treacherous.

Nearly a year after getting a federal grant, the town is proceeding with plans to extend a sidewalk on the north side of East Market Street between Route 9G and Hyde Park Heights Apartments.

In February, the town was awarded a \$147,000 Community Development Block Grant to improve pedestrian access on the road also known as County Route 41. The federal grant program is administered by Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development.

The money will let the town extend the sidewalk in front of the Stewart's Shop at the corner by about 900 feet to Hyde Park Heights Apartments.

Town officials said the new sidewalk will make it safer for visitors and residents who live in apartments on East Market Street and frequently walk on the road's shoulder to Stewart's, Rite Aid Pharmacy and other stores at the Route 9G intersection.

"Really, the focus there is public safety," said Councilman Ken Schneider, D-4th Ward. "There's a tremendous amount of pedestrian traffic going to the intersection with Route 9G. You have a lot of seniors, families and children walking to that intersection."

Hyde Park is a travel destination. The town is home to Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, President Roosevelt's home, Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site, Val-Kill Cottage and other historic locations, as well as the internationally recognized Culinary Institute of America and its restaurants.

Bob Delarm, who owns Delarm's Auto Body on East Market Street, said extending the sidewalks is a good use of the grant money.

"There's quite a bit of traffic there," he said. "It's a good spot to do it. It will make it a little bit safer."

Hyde Park Supervisor Aileen Rohr said construction of the sidewalk should begin in late spring or summer.

"We are looking forward to that being done this summer," she said.

The town is looking for the county to approve a plan for the sidewalk.

"We've submitted a concept plan to Dutchess County (Department of Public Works) for their review so they can weigh in on how much we need to offset the sidewalks from the road," Rohr said.

Depending on what is in the plan approved by the county, the town may have to acquire one or two property easements.

"We have had preliminary discussions with the property owners about the easements," Rohr said.

One of those property owners is John Golden, owner of Mill Run South Apartments on East Market Street. He said he is willing to grant an easement to the town to improve pedestrian safety along the road for not only his tenants but other nearby residents walking to the stores and shops at the intersection.

"It's quite dangerous, especially when it gets dark there and you don't see the people," Golden said.

Once the county approves the final plan, the town can acquire any necessary easements and then seek bids of contractors interested in installing the sidewalk, Rohr said.

Town officials had hoped to complete the sidewalks last year but the process of hiring an engineer to design the plan took longer than expected. Councilwoman Emily Svenson, D-1st Ward, said the county has a policy of how bids for professional services are to be evaluated that town officials had to follow.

"It did take us a little longer than we thought because we had to work some things out with the county," she said.

For the supervisor and Town Board members, who took office in January 2012, it was their first experience with applying for and receiving one of the federal block grants. Rohr and Svenson said the process leading to construction has taken longer than they anticipated.

"We were a new board, and this was our first time doing it," Svenson said.

Rohr said, "We had hopes the process would have gone faster but we are on track for this summer, and it will be a nice addition to our community."

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WHAT IS IT?

The Community Development Block Grant program provides communities with resources to address a wide range of unique community-development needs. Started in 1974, the CDBG program is one of the longest continuously run programs at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The program provides annual grants on a formula basis to 1,209 general units of local government and states.

For information, go to http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/comm_planning/communitydevelopment/programs

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