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LA GRANGE

Council to try to keep downtown rail crossings in La Grange

By Andrea Uhde • auhde@courier-journal.com • July 15, 2009

Most of the speakers at the recent La Grange City Council meeting agreed: No more downtown railroad crossings should be closed if it can be avoided.

City Council members pledged to try to avoid closing one at the south side of Second and Main streets, but they warned that won't be easy.

The council decided to close the crossing near the skate park and [fire department](#) on Nov. 1. But council members promised that if there's a chance a crossing gate could be installed instead, they would do that.

"Every effort is going to be made," Councilman Jason Taylor told the crowd at the July 6 meeting.

The council adopted a resolution that outlined its plans, and it will consider a similar ordinance in October.

The city is under pressure from the Federal Railroad Administration to make safety improvements to the crossings at the train tracks on Main Street. If none are made by next June, the city will lose its "quiet zone" and the trains will begin blowing their horns as they pass through the crossings.

A large crowd came to the meeting, and several people spoke. All of them said they wanted to keep the "quiet zone," and most said they would like to see the Second Street crossing remain open.

"It seems like you could do something that makes everyone happy," said Joe Kraig, who lives near the tracks. "And it needs to be done in a hurry."

Councilwoman Melanie Woosley said installing gates could extend past next June. She said officials could try to have it done more quickly at an additional cost, but that could be as much as \$800,000.

Also, Second Street would have to become one-way to meet required safety changes, she said.

She said another option would be for the city to make the south side of Second a private crossing at Main Street, which could cost up to \$12,000. The crossing would be in place until the fire department moves in a few years, and then it would be permanently closed.

The third option of closing the crossing at the south side of Second and Main streets immediately would be "no cost to us," she said.

In its resolution, the City Council decided to resort to the third option unless it has proof by Nov. 1 that gates could be installed in time.

The council also decided to install median separators near where First and Main streets meet to keep drivers from driving around crossing gates when they are lowered.

Kraig and others said they hope officials will contact politicians and get the June deadline pushed back, allowing the city more time to work on getting gates.

But Woosley said she's been told the deadline would be difficult to get extended. "We're told this deadline's been here forever, and just because we failed to do it doesn't mean the deadline will be moved," she said.

Several questioned why the city hadn't acted sooner. Mayor Elsie Carter said safety requirements have changed, and the fact that some train accidents have been reported inaccurately made some crossings seem less safe.

Tom Cox, who owns a business off First Street, said he supports closing the Second Street crossing.

"If we show closing it causes more problems, then we can get it reopened," Cox said. "That's the only choice we have."

Mayor Elsie Carter said she is working to get the gates, which she said is the best option.

"We haven't given up on other things," she said.

Reporter Andrea Uhde can be reached at (502) 582-4663.