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New lights, improved sidewalks along Main in La Grange

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Shoppers seem to swarm to La Grange's historic district during the holiday season, but all too often they skip an entire block of shops, business owners say.

The stretch of stores on Main Street between Walnut and Cedar is often overlooked because of the railroad track that twists by, and the chipped sidewalk that can make the walk hazardous, said Cheri Erpelding, who owns a business on that block.

"We're just trying to grow East Main," Erpelding said, referring to the area that includes her Classy Consignments store, along with a Laundromat and stores including Delizie Italiane and Mary Kinney Co.

And plans are in the works to spark that growth, Mayor Elsie Carter said.

Carter and other city officials are planning a makeover of the historic Main Street area that stretches from Cedar Street to Second. While many of the projects already have been planned, Carter jotted down ideas from business owners and residents during a meeting Nov. 18 at Serendipity Cafe, a restaurant and shop on Main Street.

Carter said the work — including new streetlights, improved sidewalks, and safer crosswalks — should begin early next year.

The city will pay for the work with a \$354,000 grant from the Federal Highway Administration.

Under current plans, the east side of Main Street, where Erpelding's business is located, will get a row of trees and planters that double as benches. A ramp will be built from the Laundromat at Walnut and Main to the crosswalk at Walnut, which Carter said will make it safer for people to cross the street.

Erpelding, who had been concerned that her area wouldn't see many improvements, called the idea "fantastic."

"It will draw attention," she said.

Plans also call for around 40 streetlights now along Main Street to be replaced with historic-looking coach lights. The damaged sidewalk on the north side of Walnut at Main will be repaired, storm-water drainage will be improved, and kick-outs — which extend sidewalks at street corners — will be added to improve traffic flow and make crosswalks safer for pedestrians. Also, a few new trees will be planted to replace dead ones, said Darleen Rusnak, the city's superintendent of public works.

Kitty Bierbaum, co-owner of The Old Oak Frame House on Main Street, said she was originally

concerned because there was discussion of removing around 15 large trees, but those plans have changed. Also, she said she was relieved to hear that if the kick-outs on the street corners take away any parking spots, it will be minimal.

"I feel better now," she said. "My main concern was the trees."

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