Merchants discuss staggered schedule

Some downtown merchants want the construction to be done in sequences.

By Paulette Tobin
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Downtown Rapid City merchants said OK Thursday to a change in the Main Street reconstruction schedule that will mean some work at the Second and Main streets intersection between Thanksgiving and Jan. 5.

But at the same meeting, some downtown merchants suggested an even bigger change to the construction schedule.

The city plans to rebuild Main Street from East Boulevard to West Boulevard, from the underground utilities up and from storefront to storefront, beginning in January.

Work is already under way on the intersections at Fifth and Main, and at Mount Rushmore Road and Main.

Currently, the plan for the work that will begin in January is to stagger the construction, doing two blocks at a time, with those two blocks being from two to four blocks apart.

The city figured the staggered construction schedule would give motorists and pedestrians the greatest access to businesses located on blocks where the street was under construction. If the weather cooperated, each block should take from six to eight weeks to rebuild, they said.

But what some merchants are suggesting is that the construction be done in sequences, two adjoining blocks at a time.

The merchants who support the sequential construction said having the city work on a block here and a block there gave people the impression the entire Main Street was torn up at once.

Sequential construction was supported Thursday by Tom Didier, owner of Hotel Alex Johnson, and Tim Powell, manager of Red Wing Shoes. They said they would rather the city do two adjoining blocks, get the work over with, then move down the street.

But other merchants, many of them from east of Fifth Street, said they wanted the construction schedule to stay the way the city had originally planned.

Larry Kostaneski, head of the city engineering division, said the schedule would have to be changed within the next few weeks if it was changed at all. Then everyone would have to live with the decision, no matter what the consequences.

He said he did not see an advantage to closing off two adjoining blocks at a time. Under that plan, some merchants would be looking out their front door to see construction 500 feet down the street in either direction.

A meeting for downtown merchants to discuss the proposed schedule change was tentatively set for Thursday, Nov. 21, with the time and date to be announced later.