

Churchville Avenue reopens today

\$2.6 million project finishes 8 months early

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STAUNTON — Churchville Avenue will open up to two-way traffic later today following the completion of a \$2.6 million Virginia Department of Transportation project that finished eight months ahead of schedule.

Meanwhile, a downtown \$1.5 million sewer project making its way up North Central Avenue has slowed after hitting a series of snags.

Since September 2009, motorists heading east on Churchville Avenue have been diverted through a number of different detours, but that all ends today with a wider road and new traffic signals along a two-tenths of-a-mile stretch from the Staunton Public Library to Albemarle Avenue.

New turn lanes were added, as were streetscape features that include a sidewalk on the road's north side and energy-efficient, "dark sky" compliant lights, designed to reduce glare and the glow of light that obscures the night sky in built-up areas.

Workers also installed new sewer and water lines.

"This project has been on the books a good 20 years," said Tom Sliwoski, Staunton's Director of Public Works.

Tuesday was the expected completion date, but a late start Monday on pavement markings pushed the re-opening of Churchville Avenue back one day.

"With construction, that happens," said Sandy Myers, a VDOT spokeswoman. An official ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held Monday morning at the corner of Churchville Avenue and North Augusta Street.

The project was originally slated for completion in June 2011, but field adjustments to the phasing and sequencing of the project brought it to a much quicker conclusion despite a harsh winter and brutally hot summer.

"These guys did work," Sliwoski said.

The contractor, Fielder's Choice Enterprises Inc., of Charlottesville, had until Dec. 17 to finish. With more than two months to spare, the company will collect a bonus of \$2,000 per day with a \$100,000 cap. Had Fiedler's Choice run past the deadline, it faced a \$2,000 per day penalty with no cap.

Sliwoski said the updates along Churchville Avenue are a marked improvement. "I wish we had the time and money to take it all the way down to the park," he said.

On the flip side, a sanitary sewer project on North Central Avenue that is replacing a line installed in 1938 has recently run into problems.

"We've had a rough month and a half," admitted City Engineer James Davis.

An aging telephone conduit recently collapsed, workers have run into solid rock and a tunnel carrying the Gum Spring Branch of Lewis Creek from Gypsy Hill Park to the Wharf parking lot is causing some ditches to fill with water. "It's a very difficult project," Davis said.

Another delay occurred when Columbia Gas of Virginia opted to install new lines along a portion of North Central Avenue.

"That was a difficult decision, but the right one," Davis said.

The project had been expected to finish this month, but Davis said the completion date has been pushed back to mid-November.



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