

JMU Seeks To Close Roads

Asks City To Make Area Friendly For Pedestrians And Bicycles

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HARRISONBURG — The temporary closure of a part of South Mason Street may last much longer — as in, forever.

James Madison University, with the city's approval, closed the portion of the street closest to campus earlier this year for renovations to a walkway connecting two buildings. Work is expected to finish next month, before students return for the start of the 2014-15 academic year.

But JMU is now seeking to permanently close the street between Martin Luther King, Jr. Way and East Grace Street, as well as close East Grace between South Mason and South Main streets. The university says it wants to make the area more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly, according to an application to the Harrisonburg Department of Planning and Community Department.

The closures align with the university's master plan, which indicate potential gates at the South Main-East Grace and South Mason-East Grace intersections.

A bus route and stops are still planned for East Grace Street.

JMU also wants the city to close an alley between South Mason and South Main streets to help the university in its effort to build a parking deck on the property.

The garage will serve the Student Success Center at the old Rockingham Memorial Hospital and the future College of Health and Behavioral Studies at RMH's former East Tower, now known as Montpelier Hall, the application says.

A public-private proposal to the city to build a hotel and conference center on the same property recently fell through. The garage would have served that as well.

Another request seeks to close a portion of Chesapeake Avenue, off West Grace Street, so JMU can build a 20,000-squarefoot annex to serve its facilities management personnel.

The applications are scheduled to be on the Harrisonburg Planning Commission's agenda for Wednesday. Other items include a public hearing for a special-use permit at Mount Clinton Pike and Acorn Drive to build a DuPont Community Credit Union branch on 3 acres.

DuPont has two current city locations.

One matter City Council sent to planners last week won't reach the commission until August: review of the proposed new water tank for the Park View area.

City planner Adam Fletcher said it would return to council with the commission's input in September at the earliest.

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