

Elmhurst awarded \$2.4 million grant for Metra station rebuild

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Elmhurst has secured a \$2.4 million grant for the reconstruction of its downtown Metra station, bringing the pool of funding available for the project to \$14.4 million.

The Illinois Commerce Commission recently approved a two-year budget that allocates the competitive grant to the city, Mayor Steve Morley announced at a meeting with aldermen this week.

Last October, the city was awarded \$10 million through a federal grant program administered by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. The DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference also has pledged to provide \$2 million through another federal program.

"I think that says a lot about staff and the hard work they're doing," Morley said of the fundraising effort.

The search for grants began early last year after officials estimated that replacing the 1960s-era station and making other transit improvements could cost roughly \$18 million.

That price tag is based on initial planning for the station rebuild, Morley said.

CDM Smith, a Chicago firm hired by the council in 2016, developed the plan to modernize the station campus and conducted a public outreach campaign to gather input from commuters. Plans calls for construction of new inbound and outbound stations, a new pedestrian tunnel at York Street and designated bus and vehicle drop-off lanes to relieve congestion.

At 2,400 square feet, the larger, inbound station would house a 1,100-square-foot waiting area, ADA-compliant washrooms and a small ticket office.

But the focal point of the redesign is a clock tower that would stand on the north side of the tracks, creating a landmark visible throughout downtown.

Next month, the city plans to release a request for qualifications from engineers to proceed to a second phase of studies for the project. That process also will involve public meetings, Morley said.

"We're going to get deep down, much deeper, into the design aspect and certainly the residents of Elmhurst will be able to participate in that," he said.

A tentative project schedule shows construction would not begin until summer 2019 if the council agreed to move forward with the overhaul of the station that was last renovated in the 1990s.

With more than 2,300 weekday boardings, the station ranks as the busiest stop on the Union Pacific West Line, according to the city.

The ridership tally is expected to rise 30 percent in the next two decades, but the site raises accessibility and safety issues.

An existing pedestrian tunnel, for instance, bypasses the tracks east of Cottage Hill Avenue, but is accessible only by stairs.