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(c. Online)

## North Andover's downtown receives face-lift

NORTH ANDOVER — Orange cones, machinery and hard hats on Main Street could only mean one thing — the downtown improvement project is under way.

Crews are tearing up and redesigning the intersection of Water and Main streets this week to make it safer for drivers, giving them a better sight line. They also have ripped up the brick crosswalks and are widening the sidewalks in some spots to make room for planters.

"We're about midway through the project now," public works Director Bruce Thibodeau said. "And nobody's really complaining. ... We've been able to keep vehicle and pedestrian traffic moving so far."

The project is in its second phase.

Crews worked on sidewalks on both sides of the street earlier this summer.

Thibodeau said while most of the work will be finished by the fall, the streets will be paved and new crosswalks laid next spring, allowing the roads time to settle. The brick crosswalks will be replaced with a special thermoplastic surface that resembles brick but is easier to maintain.

Town officials also are looking to place welcome signs, planters and trees downtown to beautify the area come spring.

Sprucing up Main Street has been talked about for years as a way to revitalize the downtown area and bring in more business and foot traffic. The money finally became available this year.

Thibodeau said the town has \$662,890 for the project.

An estimated \$101,000 comes from state Chapter 90 money put aside for work on Main Street, and the additional \$561,890 was designated for the Old Town Center work. Thibodeau said they ended up having a surplus of Old Center money after receiving \$800,000 more than expected from the state for that project.

Main Street isn't the only section of downtown to receive a face-lift.

David Steinbergh of RCG LCC is renovating the mill buildings at the corner of Water and High streets and converting them into apartments, shops, restaurants and offices. The Messina

family, which owns **First & Main Marketplace**, is working to fix up the central plaza with new facades and landscaping.

The town recently formed a merchants association, which it hopes will help with the upkeep of downtown.

"We're hoping to do an adopt-a-planter program with downtown businesses," Thibodeau said. "Kind of like the adopt-an-island setups you see around. ... We want to work with them whatever way we can have a partnership."