

Square to see new trees, lamp-posts

by Meredith McNally

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Upcoming renovations will soon bring changes to Madison's Capitol Square, an area highly deteriorated due to harsh Wisconsin weather and heavy pedestrian traffic over the years.

The \$3.2 million project will replace severely weakened and diseased trees, add vintage light posts, replace benches and widen the sidewalk that surrounds the square.

According to the State Capitol and Executive Residence Board's master plan, the removal of six trees on Main Street will start this Saturday and construction on the first eighth of the grounds will undergo renovations beginning April 17.

"The plan is to start to do a project in mid-April on an eighth of Capitol Square," Scott Larrivee, spokesperson for the Wisconsin Department of Administration, explained. "Then, the board will look at [the newly renovated area] before determining if [the board] would like to continue with the rest of the project."

The area that will undergo reconstruction first will be on Pinckney Street, between King Street and East Washington Avenue.

As a result of construction, the sidewalk on Pinckney Street will be closed from about mid-April until the completion of the renovation around mid-August, but according to Larrivee, construction should not significantly affect public events in the area.

In fact, the weakened sidewalk will be repaired and widened from about nine to 12 feet to "help accommodate the concerts, the Farmers' Market and the heavy foot traffic on the Square," Larrivee said.

Madison Environmental Group President Sonya Newenhouse said the revitalization of Capitol Square will bring new life to one of the most prominent areas of the city.

"I believe it is important to renovate and maintain beautiful places, so it's wonderful that we're paying attention to and improving one of the most important features in our state," she said.

In addition to the new sidewalk, seven Freeman Maple trees will be planted on the park grounds to replace the dangerously weakened Norway Maples that will soon be removed due to the safety threats they pose to pedestrians and surrounding buildings.

"I think tree planting is important, but we also need to understand and that when trees are diseased or in the wrong place, they need to be removed," Newenhouse said. "Change is good so long as things are moving forward."

Although the construction may cause pedestrians to take a slight detour, Larrivee said he believes "folks will feel that the temporary inconvenience is worth it upon the completion of the final project."