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Road improvements done in front of Hammond Square

By Brennan David

The city of Hammond has accepted U.S. 51 and Interstate 12 ramp improvements near Hammond Square from Beverly Construction Co., ending seven months of construction and traffic congestion.

The official action came Tuesday evening during the city council meeting.

Project Engineer Kiley Bates of Spangler Engineering said construction is complete but orange pylons will remain until new traffic signals are installed sometime in mid-August.

Once the five traffic lights are positioned and operational, all safety cones and equipment will be retrieved.

City Engineer Chuck Spangler said the project finished six days ahead of schedule, coming in under budget at \$72,269. The \$2.5 million project began in January, funded through a bond issued to the city for infrastructure improvements.

The city council voted unanimously to accept the resolution during Tuesday evening's meeting.

The council also approved an ordinance to allow Palace Properties, LLC. to construct a 75-foot pylon sign fronting Interstate 12.

The sign, which will advertise Hammond Square anchor stores, is 10 feet higher than the C-3 zoning allows, but a variance was approved.

Code Enforcement Officer Bobby Mitchell said the sign will be able to handle winds up to 110 miles per hour.

Police issues

Police Chief Roddy Devall finally received approval for appropriations for 11 new vehicles the department needs.

The purchase will include nine Ford police cruisers and two Dodge Durangos at a total of \$230,214.

Devall said the department later will need more funding to equip and strip the vehicles.

During the public hearing part of the meeting, the chief asked the council for an increase in jailers' salaries. The occasion marked the third time the chief has done so, but this time he said to have discovered more funding.

Devall would like the \$15,000 appropriated for the Sweet 16 Tournament to fund his jailer salary increases. The tournament has moved from Hammond to Monroe.

“The turnover is so high in the jail,” Devall said. “They can't support a family on \$20,000.”

He would like jailers to be placed on the same pay scale as beginning officers and is asking for action to be taken as soon as possible.

“I don't mean to be aggravating, but I have people I have to take care of,” he said.

Mayor Mayson Foster is asking the chief to compromise for a pay scale of just below an officer, which Devall said he would accept.

An independent research company has been hired to provide salary survey, band results are still being calculated.

The council did not approve any funding at the meeting.

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