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**Title: MacArthur extension closer to realization**  
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It has come down to a preconstruction conference for the \$22.5 million **MACARTHUR BOULEVARD** extension.

When the work is done in the next couple of years, **MacArthur** will be extended southward, creating a link between Wabash Avenue and Interstate 72.

Halverson Construction Co. of Springfield won the contract, which is one of the city's largest road projects in recent memory. According to local transportation officials, the bid came in about \$5.2 million lower than the engineers' estimates.

Halverson and Illinois Department of Transportation representatives will meet this week to begin mapping out the first phase of the project, which eventually will continue south to Woodside Road.

State transportation officials said the company has begun putting equipment in place and a schedule should be announced following the preconstruction conference. The first phase is scheduled for completion in 2008 and the second in 2009.

The first phase includes a two-mile, six-lane stretch from the **MacArthur/Wabash** intersection to I-72. The work also includes a new interstate interchange, relocation of Recreation Drive to an interchange just south of the interstate and four new bridges, including one over the Norfolk Southern railroad.

The Interurban Trail bike path will be taken over the railroad and beneath the interstate to continue an uninterrupted route to Chatham. The future of the trail was a key point in early negotiations for the project.

Work is well along, too, on the first commercial development along what will become the **MacArthur** extension. A CVS pharmacy at the southeast corner of **MacArthur** and Wabash is expected to open by midsummer.

While the **MacArthur** extension is easily the largest project, the same round of recent bid awards also included modernization of traffic signals at several intersections along Illinois 4 and Veterans Parkway, including at Spaulding Orchard Road, Panther Creek Road and Andrew Road.

A nearly \$770,000 contract also was awarded for additional Interstate 55 median cables intended to reduce crossover accidents. The next section scheduled for work is from Clear Lake Avenue to Sherman.

Groundwork has begun for another project that will mean a major shift in traffic patterns on the south side of the city. Infrastructure is going in for an extension of PRAIRIE CROSSING DRIVE that will link Chatham Road and Veterans Parkway. The project is part of the Woodside Place development that includes the city's second Menards "megastore." Work on the store east of the Meijer supercenter is expected to begin this summer.

A June trial date has been scheduled in a legal dispute over the former SPORTS AUTHORITY space in the Southwest Plaza III shopping center on Veterans Parkway. The store was among several damaged by March 2006 tornadoes, but the company decided not to reopen the Springfield site.

At issue is whether the tornado damage was sufficient to allow the company to vacate a lease scheduled to run through 2017. The space has been put on the market for lease pending the outcome of the case.

The store opened as Sportmart in 2001 and was renamed Sports Authority in 2005.

Two local businesses are in new locations. THE ROCK SHOP, a locally owned music store that has been in business 23 years, has moved to a larger building at 1808 W. Jefferson St., just across Jefferson from the previous location.

Owner Todd Rushing said the additional space would let the shop begin offering lessons. Hours are from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and from noon to 5 p.m. Saturday, though hours will change once lessons begin. The phone number is 546-8980 and the Web site, [www.rockshopguitars.com](http://www.rockshopguitars.com).

CIGARS FOR AFICIONADOS is at 727 North Grand Ave. E. Hours are from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday. The phone number is 744-1710.

COMMERCE BANK of St. Louis is considering a branch in the Springfield market, though a representative said last week no decisions have been made on a location or an opening date. The holding company, Commerce Bancshares Inc. has approximately 340 locations in Missouri, Illinois and Kansas.

Local gasoline prices drifted ever closer to \$3 per gallon in the past week, topping that price for some premium grades. At \$2.95-per-gallon for regular self-serve unleaded, prices were about the same as a year ago, according to a daily fuel gauge report AAA MOTOR CLUB.

The record for Springfield was \$3.17 on Sept. 3, 2005, according to the report.

Kimberly Dumas of Springfield has opened a MARKET DAY GOURMET outlet, a home-based franchise that specializes in gourmet foods, spices and kitchen accessories, including in-home demonstrations.

The phone number and e-mail are 416-3027 and mktdayrep05@yahoo.com.

The KOHL'S department-store chain and ARCHER DANIELS MIDLAND have announced "going green" projects. Kohl's, based in Wisconsin and with an outlet in Springfield, plans to convert 75 percent of its stores in California to solar power. The first two of 24 stores targeted for conversion should be ready this year and the remainder in 2008.

ADM and Massachusetts-based Metabolix Inc. have announced a joint research project for a biodegradable plastic. The so-called "natural plastics" would be created using renewable sources such as corn sugar.

ADM, naturally, is the world's largest processors of soybeans, corn and wheat, and also is a leading producer of biofuels and ethanol.

THE JACKSONVILLE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE has joined the list of local chambers formally opposing Gov. Rod Blagojevich's proposed gross receipts tax on business transactions. A recently adopted resolution urged members of the General Assembly to reject the tax "on behalf of our 583 members." The Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce has adopted a similar resolution.

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