

College Moving Forward With Large Parking Lot Project

Demolition First: Four Homes Owned by College to Be Demolished; College Leaders Will Visit Planning Commission This Evening

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It might not be long before Centralia College gains some much-needed parking, but first there's a bit of a landscape change that needs to take place.

The city of Centralia has given Centralia College a permit to demolish four homes on the 800 block of Centralia College Boulevard. The permits call for the demolition of single-family residences at 812 and 814 Centralia College Boulevard, and another two homes with an 816 address.

The contract was awarded to Woodland Industries, with the price tag on each demolition listed at \$5,850 each for a total of \$23,400. Centralia College currently owns each of the houses.

The demolition, scheduled for later this week, is part of a planned \$1 million project to not only create a new parking lot, but to create green space along China Creek, stormwater retention and a walking path with a bridge leading from the lot to the Kiser Natural Outdoor Learning Lab, and on to the main area of campus.

To that end, Centralia College Vice President Steve Ward and Director of Maintenance Gil Elder will speak to the Centralia Planning Commission tonight and request that the city sell Ash Street from Centralia College Boulevard to where it terminates near the diesel technology building. The college then hopes to vacate that street, which will then become the central area for the parking lot.

"At the bottom of the street it's blocked off, and we own both sides of the property along it," Ward said. "I think it's pretty much a no-brainer (for the city to approve it). The only letters we have received from residents living near it are letters of support."

If members of the planning commission approve the college's request, it would then go to Centralia City Council for a first and second reading in subsequent public meetings.

Ward said the parking lot is much-needed, especially with another four-year class added to the mix at the diesel technology center, directly southeast of where the parking lot would be built.

"We just know what the habits of our students are. It's not much different than if they go to Capital Mall and the lot's full — you circle around until something opens up," Ward said. "We hope to have well over 100 spaces in this lot."

With the upcoming pedestrian path project included, Ward estimated the total price tag at \$1 million, but said the project is worth it for the college, especially when it comes to meeting the goals of the 20-year master plan and the partnership with the community.

"This is also part of a long-term goal to take China Creek and turn it into more of an asset," Ward said, pointing to the college's completion of the KNOLL project in 2011. "There are multiple benefits to this."

