

Washington Avenue at Centralia College to Be Closed in July

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Centralia College is in the process of replacing the old student commons building with a larger facility, closing Washington Avenue permanently to traffic and creating a pedestrian mall.

According to Bill Sloan, project architect with MSGS Architects in Olympia, the avenue would be closed from Pear Street to Centralia College Boulevard to create an esplanade for pedestrian traffic.

The new commons area, which is set to be approximately 70,000 square feet, would replace the current structure that sits at the corner of Centralia College Boulevard and Ash Street.

Washington Avenue, which was purchased by the college from the city of Centralia, would be modeled similar to the current pedestrian mall stretching east to west through the center of the college's campus. At the intersection of the existing esplanade and Washington Avenue, Sloan said, a circular plaza would be established.

The street will be closed at the start of construction, which is tentatively scheduled for the middle of July. Closing the avenue to traffic would improve campus safety, Sloan said.

"I think the vision that the administration has of creating a more pedestrian friendly campus for the students at the college is a really good one," he said. "The movement of traffic through the college on Washington Avenue I think is a little dangerous, particularly between class when there are a lot of students wanting to cross Washington Avenue."

Sloan said cars have to stop in two or three different directions when pedestrians cross, creating a safety concern. He also stated the pedestrian mall would provide a better atmosphere.

"It's going to increase safety and it's going to increase the ambiance of the campus," he said.

The new commons area is one of three recent projects taking place on the campus, Sloan said, including the new science building and the theater building.

The three-story building will provide the same functions as the other commons area while providing a cafeteria, a bookstore, student services, financial aid, counseling and additional classrooms, among other services.

"It will be a big, very important addition to the campus," Sloan said.

Ross Jarvis, civil engineer for SCJ Alliance, said another ongoing project is taking place on Ash Street where the parking lot near the proposed area of the commons building will be relocated. Ash Street is already a vacated street, Jarvis said.