

Oklahoma City manager promises E.K. Gaylord Boulevard reconstruction will occur

Changes to Project 180 that include the elimination of E.K. Gaylord Boulevard ran into criticism at Tuesday's Oklahoma City Council meeting, with one council member questioning why they had not been informed about cost overruns and revenue shortfalls with the downtown makeover.

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Changes to Project 180 that include the elimination of E.K. Gaylord Boulevard ran into criticism at Tuesday's Oklahoma City Council meeting, with one council member questioning why they had not been informed about cost overruns and revenue shortfalls with the downtown makeover.

As reported Tuesday by *The Oklahoman*, the tax increment financing district set up in agreement with Devon Energy Corp. is seeing a \$10 million shortfall in revenues, while cost overruns are taking place with street and park improvements throughout downtown.

Ward 2 Councilman Ed Shadid on Tuesday recalled how the council was given an update on Project 180 last week.

“None of the concerns brought up in any of these articles were mentioned in the presentation to council last week,” Shadid said. “There was no mention of cost overruns or the reduced area that is going to be addressed.”

City Manager Jim Couch responded that the presentation at the Nov. 1 council meeting was intended only as a construction update, and that city staff is working on a more extensive analysis to present at a later date.

E.K. Gaylord Boulevard was cited as one of the least pedestrian streets downtown in a 2008 study by walkability consultant Jeff Speck. But city staff told *The Oklahoman* the street was ranked as a low priority in the Project 180 program — even though it had never been authorized to be cut by any of the policymaking bodies that oversee Project 180.

Shadid on Tuesday questioned whether the elimination of E.K. Gaylord Boulevard indicates city staff is not serious about proceeding with development of a transit hub at the Santa Fe Depot, which would require a narrowing of the boulevard to allow for

expansion of the depot.

“We approved the intermodal hub study, and we approved securing all the rights of way to make this possible,” Shadid said. “The study advocated for three platforms. To put the transit hub there, we've got to narrow Gaylord. So to eliminate Gaylord from Project 180 is significant.”

Couch responded he's confident the city has an excellent shot of winning a federal transportation grant that would pay for reconstruction of the street as part of creating the transit hub. He added the street could be added back into the Project 180 program as city staff gets a better grasp of costs and revenues.

“I'm confident we're doing to do Gaylord,” Couch said. “I'm not exactly sure how we're going to do that right now. But there are a lot of options out there. ... I think we all acknowledge going from downtown to Bricktown, getting over Gaylord, is not easy. Going as pedestrian there, it's a tough walk.”



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