

\$400K grant to help revitalize Five Points

Lighting, crosswalks, landscaping will be among improvements

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Five Points scored some points in the 2003 federal budget, and the midtown Huntsville neighborhood soon will cash in on those points.

U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby announced Thursday the federal Department of Transportation is releasing \$400,000 for the Five Points Improvement Project. Planned improvements for the historic neighborhood include lighting, crosswalks, curb and parking improvements, landscaping, and rerouted traffic patterns.

Merchants and residents view the improvements as a way to revitalize and stabilize the neighborhood.

Marie Bostick, assistant city planner, said Thursday the money falls far short of the \$3 million requested, but it's a start. "This is the first grant like this the city has gotten that's for a revitalization project in an older commercial area," she said.

Shelby, R-Tuscaloosa, and U.S. Rep. Bud Cramer, D-Huntsville, helped secure the money in a \$397 billion federal spending bill signed by President Bush in February.

Bostick said the target area runs basically from the alley behind Propst Drugs to the shopping complex that houses the Thai Garden restaurant, and from Russell to Dement streets. She said the federal money will be routed through the state DOT. Construction may be a year or more away.

"We have to wait for an agreement from the state, then we'll hire a design engineer and get our clearances from the federal government before you see any tangible work done," she said. Bostick said planners will have to review the master plan and agree on priorities.

City Councilman Mark Russell, whose district includes Five Points, said he hopes the improvements will encourage residents to walk more and patronize neighborhood merchants.

"New neighborhoods like The Ledges and Providence are built around the concept of a town center with a neighborhood built around it," he said. "There seems to be a demand for it."

Also included in the 2003 federal transportation bill was \$90,000 for sidewalk and lighting improvements in Lowe Mill Village and \$135,000 for construction of a plaza at Alabama Constitution Village.