

Building boom: More than \$300M worth of projects

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MARQUETTE - Millions of dollars will fund several ongoing and new large-scale construction projects that are expected to take place within Marquette city limits this year.

"We've got a lot of construction projects, not all of them city (organized), but many of them will be related to what we do," City Manager Mike Angeli said during a recent Marquette City Commission meeting.

The above-average construction season will demand millions of work-hours from contractors and general laborers as developers continue several projects already in progress while others prepare to break ground on multiple new ones.

Article Photos



One of several large construction projects underway or planned for this year in the city of Marquette is the next phase of the Liberty Way development on Washington Street, shown here recently. (Journal photo by Ryan Jarvi)

"I dare to say there ... could be a shortage of laborers associated with construction," Angeli said. "We are well above and beyond what many communities are doing."

Tony Retaskie, executive director of the Upper Peninsula Construction Council, which is based in Escanaba, suspects his organization may have to reach out to laborers in northern parts of Wisconsin and Michigan's Lower Peninsula.

Retaskie said the council has recruited workers on a temporary basis from outside the U.P. in the past, but the trade group has also been increasing efforts to develop the regional workforce.

"We're trying to make sure that the customers don't go unserved, and (workforce development) is an ongoing conversation at our table," he said.

For those laborers in the U.P. Construction Council alone, Retaskie estimates about 2 million work-hours are expected in the coming year, up by about 25 percent from what the region has averaged in the past few years.

"Most of that is Marquette County, and obviously there are some jobs that have already started, so as those jobs wind down there will be workers for the next job," he said.

Retaskie said many apprenticeship training programs are in full recruitment mode as even more work-hours are expected for the 2017 and '18 construction seasons.

"We're preparing for this (increase in demand), and actually we have been for some time now," he said, noting the council had recently purchased a trailer that is brought to area schools for career fair events allowing students a hands-on opportunity with some trade industry equipment.

"The next three years will probably be the best time to become an apprentice," Retaskie said, adding that many trade professionals currently have the highest number of apprentices they've had in many years.

Some construction projects, along with estimated costs, that could occur within the city at various times this year include:

In addition, work could begin on new living and dining facilities at Northern Michigan University through a \$100 million public-private partnership.

"If this moves forward, we plan to have a contract signed at the end of April and hope to begin construction this summer," said Derek Hall, assistant vice president of marketing and communications.

Hall said the new facilities would replace aging living complexes on campus - specifically the apartments located on Summit Street to the north of the DeVos Art Museum, and NMU's Quad I located to the east of Lincoln Avenue, which consists of Gant, Spalding, Halverson and Payne halls.

Preliminary discussions had called for roughly 1,200 beds, Hall said, though that number could change as developers and the university solidify details.

Angeli said the amount of construction activity within the city may be unprecedented.

"If you think about it, with all these, I don't think we've ever seen this many construction projects, large construction projects at one time in the city," he said. "Hopefully we'll be able to manage everything properly."

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