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LOCAL & STATE

Winter Park to bury power lines along Fairbanks Ave.

Construction on \$16 million project will begin Nov. 1

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The city of Winter Park is teaming up with Duke Energy for a yearlong project to bury transmission lines that run along the south side of Fairbanks Avenue between Interstate 4 and Harper Street.

Construction on the \$16 million project, funded by a Florida Department of Transportation grant, is slated to begin Nov. 1 and will be done in five phases, starting at Harper Street then moving west.

A 30-foot-long, 14-foot-wide tunnel jacking pit – used for microtunneling to put the lines underground – will be installed on Harper Street, requiring closure of the area between Comstock Avenue and Fairbanks Avenue until mid-February.

Dan D'Alessandro, director of the city's Electric Utility Department, said the underground lines will be less vulnerable to external hazards than the existing poles.

"They're exposed to any object, like a tree, wind, if a car hits a pole, and the lines fall," D'Alessandro said.

After Hurricane Irma, about 9,000 customers in Winter Park were without power – a situation officials are hoping to avoid in the future as more areas are converted to an underground system.

About half of Winter Park's power lines are already underground and the city has committed to spending \$3.5 million annually until all lines are buried by 2026.

The poles on Fairbanks Avenue carry power lines operated by Duke Energy and cable and telephone lines owned by other companies, which is why FDOT is funding the project, D'Alessandro said.

Although underground outages are rare, they are difficult to locate because crews have to dig up the ground instead of restringing overhead wires. Only one of the power disruptions in Winter Park after Irma was caused by damage to part of the underground system.

"When it does happen, it takes

longer to restore but not significantly longer the way we designed it," D'Alessandro said.

Most of the construction on Fairbanks will happen overnight but front entrances to some businesses will not be accessible during the day, traffic will shift and pedestrians won't be able to use the sidewalks while crews are working.

To help mitigate traffic problems, the middle lane on Fairbanks Avenue, currently used as a left-turn lane, will be changed into an eastbound travel lane.

For updated information about the project, visit www.cityofwinterpark.org/fairbanks

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