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Statehouse big dig on schedule

Initial phase involving large underground parking garage should be finished by July 2004

By Chris Grenz
The Capital-Journal

Despite a brutal cold snap and two recent snowstorms, work on an underground parking garage at the Capitol is moving ahead as planned.

"My impression is it's on schedule and under control," Department of Administration Secretary Howard Fricke said Tuesday.

The mammoth hole on the north side of the Statehouse grounds represents the first part of an ambitious \$135 million Capitol restoration project, the building's first face-lift in more than 80 years. The project will be done in four phases spread over eight years.

The first phase is expected to be completed by July 2004, said Caleb Asher, a spokesman for the Department of Administration, the state agency that is in charge of the Statehouse and the renovation project.



Ed Peel and Matt Myers, of Kaw Valley Steel, work on the rebar for a column of the underground parking garage and visitors center on the north grounds of the Statehouse.

ANTHONY S. BUSH/The Capital-Journal

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Excavation for the garage began in January 2000, but much of the work done recently has been "deep infrastructure" tasks, such as laying electrical and sewer lines, Asher said. Crews also have been working to stabilize the ground to ensure that it can support the garage's weight, which will have 550 spaces, including 200 for visitors.

Workers are just beginning to pour concrete, which will soon be noticeable from street level.

"We'll see much more of that rising up," Asher said.

So far, \$55 million in state-backed bonds have been sold to cover the cost of the project. But as attention shifts to phase two, which will involve the renovation of the East Wing -- the oldest part of the Capitol -- lawmakers will be asked to reauthorize another round of bonds.

Some legislators have expressed concerns about moving forward given the state's fiscal crisis. But Fricke said he is optimistic.

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"I think they will authorize the funds to keep the project going," he said. "I think everybody believes that it is a worthwhile project. And for us to stop or slow down in the midst of it would be more expensive in the long run."

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