Council nixes plans for eastern bypass

By Adam Smeltz
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STATE COLLEGE -- Borough Council roundly agreed this week that it won't fund the Eastern Inner Loop highway plan or any new studies of the concept.

"You don't want to encourage more traffic," Councilwoman Elizabeth Goreham said Tuesday. "A four-lane highway through the (planned Penn State) arboretum would have a terrible impact."

Centre Region officials last week asked State College and other big municipalities to decide whether they want to press forward with the Eastern Inner Loop, which has been under discussion for three decades. The highway, projected to cost $44 million, would connect University Drive with North Atherton Street at Vairo Boulevard.

At a work session Monday night, State College council members said the idea would no longer be cost-effective in easing traffic congestion. Driver patterns have changed too much since it was first conceived, they said.

"The question arises if this is a make-work (project) for engineering companies rather than a solution to traffic problems," Councilman Jeff Kern said Tuesday. He called the highway plan a "$44 million boondoggle."

Council President Tom Daubert said that "the benefit certainly will not outweigh the cost."

The borough, under preliminary plans, could be asked to contribute $2 million to $3 million to the highway, Goreham said. She said she's concerned that it could run too close to a key water well.
Kern and Daubert mentioned several possible alternatives for relieving traffic through the downtown-University Park area. Daubert said a new entry to the Mount Nittany Expressway near Fox Hollow Road, at roughly $3 million, is one possibility.

Other less expensive options, Kern said, could include widening Waddle Road near the expressway and extending Clinton Avenue north of University Park.

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