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## **City of Valparaiso Preserve Historic Bricks in Downtown Project**

As the City of Valparaiso adds housing and parking in The Linc and Lincoln Highway Garage projects, city leaders are also working to preserve history. “We’ve been very careful to ensure the new facilities match the historic charm of our downtown and we’re preserving each bit of history we can, down to the bricks on the street,” said Mayor Matt Murphy. Bricks from historic Valparaiso Street are being painstakingly removed so they can be restored and reinstalled at the conclusion to the project.

“The community will benefit from better drainage and better environmental stewardship as we install new drainage, and separate storm and sanitary sewers beneath the upgraded street. Yet, at the end, they’ll still see the original historic bricks restored,” said Murphy. With expert help from Christine Hough, Genealogy Clerk at Porter County Public Library System, the City has learned much about the original bricks.

### **Brick Street History in Valparaiso**

In 1892 a portion of Jefferson Street and the south end of Locust Street were paved with brick, the first paved streets in the city. In 1908, contractor Fred Hoffman of Rochester, Indiana was awarded contracts for paving Main Street (now known as Lincolnway). He was selected as the lowest bidder of 11 contractors and the bricks used included Metropolitan, Terre Haute, Nelsonville, Townsend and Wooster bricks, ranging in price from \$1.42 to \$1.48 per square yard.

In 1935, Lincolnway was being resurfaced. The city took up the paving bricks, sold some and used others around town. Sometime after October 1937 some of the Nelsonville bricks (\$1.42 per square yard when originally installed in 1908) were used on Valparaiso Street, once known as the city’s narrowest thoroughfare. The Valparaiso Street project was paid for by property owners along the street. Labor cost was expected to be \$60 per property.

The original Nelsonville bricks had been manufactured in Nelsonville, Ohio and used around the country. They had a salt-glazed surface which made them water tight and long-lasting. In 1904, this brick even won first prize at the World’s Fair in St. Louis. The Indianapolis 500 race track also was paved with Nelsonville bricks.

### **Transformative Projects. Historic Character.**

The Linc and Lincoln Highway Garage projects require excavating bits of Valparaiso Street, providing an opportunity to upgrade underground utilities for the future. As the street is excavated, the original Nelsonville bricks are being carefully removed and preserved. While a hard surface will temporarily be laid to keep the project moving forward, the preserved bricks will be reinstalled at the conclusion of the project.

“While progress is important and a city must evolve to meet current and future needs in order to stay vital, we also recognize the value of maintaining character and preserving history. Certainly, the process of removing and restoring these bricks is adding to the project. But the quality of the materials and the historic charm made the added steps worth it. We’re confident the final product downtown will be one that both advances our city and preserves its character,” said Murphy.

The Linc and Lincoln Highway Garage projects represent a \$54.4 million public-private development, built with support from the Indiana Economic Development Commission (IEDC), the Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission and private developer HighGround. The IEDC awarded the project \$9.6

million in redevelopment tax credits as it increases opportunities for local businesses and housing for residents while enhancing the long-term sustainability of a thriving downtown.

**The Linc** is a mixed-use development located on the north side of Lincolnway, which will include 121 modern apartments on the top floors and commercial suites on the ground floor facing Lincolnway. It is expected to open in the winter of 2024. The **Lincoln Highway Garage**, located at the northeast corner of Lincolnway and Morgan Boulevard, will include 362 spaces for The Linc and surrounding businesses and neighborhoods. It is expected to be complete by the end of 2024.

Photo caption: The historic Nelsonville bricks once used on Main Street in Valparaiso (now known as Lincolnway) are now being preserved from their location on Valparaiso Street. At the completion of The Linc and Lincoln Highway Garage projects, which also are upgrading underground utilities, the restored bricks will be replaced, in an additional step to preserve the historic character of Valparaiso's downtown.