

Road project in Charles City is attractive and eco-friendly

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CHARLES CITY (KWWL) -- Homeowners in the historic part of Charles City really don't mind dealing with torn up roads and plenty of detours. For them, the end result, is worth the trouble.

"The streets in this part of Charles City were pretty rough, puddles all over when it would rain," noted neighbor Gary Finger.

But it's pretty clear from looking at the completed sections, this is not a typical road project.

"England, about the time Black Beauty was popular! That's what it reminds me of, cobblestone streets," Finger said.

They look like cobblestone or brick roads. But they are a little different. Workers are laying permeable pavers. As City Administrator Tom Brownlow explains, not only do they look neat, they serve an important purpose.

"We should have learned in 2008 that we had to start handling our water a little differently. We couldn't just dump it in the river and send it downstream," he said.

So when heavy rains come, instead of the water pooling up on the road, or running off into the river, it will actually go through the pavers, into the ground, get filtered out, and then go into the city's aquifer. On the way down, water travels through several feet of rock, sand, and soil.

"As it goes down through there there's actually biological organisms that will decompose any oil, gasoline, antifreeze, that type of thing that's on the roads, so it'll clean the water," Brownlow added.

The new road is only one part of flood mitigation in Charles City. But it's already proven to help during recent storms. And neighbors appreciate the added curb appeal.

"I think this street just looks fabulous! I can't wait till everything gets done," Finger said.

American Reinvestment and Recovery Act money is covering one fifth of the project's \$2.9 million price tag. An I-JOBS grant will help with another \$100,000. The city's portion -- a little more than \$2 million -- is coming from local option sales tax money. Brownlow said that's about the same price as an ordinary road project.

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