

Permeable parking, landscape changes planned on Santa Fe River trail

Park(ing) Day highlights transformation of pavement to water resource

Staci Matlock for the New Mexican

Drivers on Alameda Street near downtown Santa Fe did a double take as they neared a metered parking space in front of Del Charro Saloon at the Inn of the Governors.

Some landscape architects hired by the city had converted the lot into a temporary "park," complete with two pear trees, brick paving, various potted native grasses and three patio chairs. It was an opportunity for architects from the Surroundings firm to educate passers-by about planned renovations on the urban trail that runs along the Santa Fe River from East Palace Avenue to St. Francis Drive.

"We are proposing a number of new green infrastructure standards within the parkway to slow, treat and release stormwater in lieu of direct outflow into the Santa Fe River," said Kenneth Francis, who founded the firm along with his wife, Sandra Donner, and Faith Okuma. "One example is through permeable parking spaces along Alameda that will allow stormwater to infiltrate through the soil before flowing into the river."

A primary goal of the renovation is to make better use of the stormwater that normally rushes down streets and shoots into the Santa Fe River at constricted points, causing erosion and dumping dirty, oil-tainted water into the riverbed. "Stormwater is a problem for the river right now," said Maggie Ryan, the firm's newest landscape architect.

The architects will use various stormwater designs to slow the flow and clean up the water before it enters the river. In some portions they'll line the path and parking spaces with brick laid over an 18-inch gravel-filled bed. The brick and gravel will slow down stormwater and filter it into the soil, allowing it to reach some of the roots of riverside trees growing deep under the paved streets.

The designers will create small diversions they call stormwater acequias, designed to loop around native trees and shrubs, again slowing stormwater flow and cleaning it up naturally before dumping it into the river. The historic stone curb on Alameda between Don Gaspar Avenue and Old Santa Fe Trail will be reconfigured to leave a few small gaps where the water can seep over to the river.

Heritage fruit tree varieties will be planted along the river trail in addition to other native vegetation.

The city of Santa Fe contracted with Surroundings to design the Parque del Rio in 2009. They plan to go out for bid on the construction work at the end of October and will focus on four main areas along a two and a half mile stretch of the trail: near the Boys and Girls Club; along DeVargas Park; the historic area between Don Gaspar and Old Santa Fe Trail; and along El Alamo area.

The work will include an ADA accessible path from Delgado Street to Palace Avenue. "Right now, it's just a dirt path," Francis said.

On Friday, Ryan said the parking space "park" had attracted a lot of attention through the day. "Drivers are doing double and triple takes," she said. Park(ing) Day is a national event where parking spaces are converted to promote urban green spaces.

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