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Work on environmentally friendly City Hall parking lot nears midway point

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Work on the first phase of the City Hall parking lot reconstruction is expected to be complete in time for the Fourth of July, officials said Wednesday while doing a Facebook Live event to explain the project and answer questions from viewers.

The nearly \$1 million project is rebuilding the parking lot to the west of City Hall to improve water quality and control runoff when heavy rains fall.

City Engineer Tracy Warner and Stormwater Specialist Jake Moore hosted the 45-minute long social media broadcast from the parking lot, answering questions from viewers about the reason behind the project and its cost.

Following the broadcast, Warner said the pavement in the parking lot had failed, and the city began looking at its options for replacement with a more environmentally friendly system.

What they came up with is a system that will not only control runoff but help filter the water that does make it to the storm sewer and eventually into Squaw Creek, Warner said.

The level furthest down in the ground consists of 2 1/2 feet of larger rock, topped with a layer of smaller stones, followed by the permeable pavers, which allows water to be better absorbed into the ground, helping to reduce runoff, Warner said.

There is also a tile in the median which separates the northern and southern halves of the parking lot, which will help divert water during heavy storm events to the storm sewer.

The layers of rock will also help clean the water as it is absorbed into the ground

water or makes it way to the creek, Warner said.

“Whether it’s drippings from cars, or fertilizer or other nutrients that might be here, it’s going to be filtered by the rock,” she said.

Jennifer Welch, an urban conservationist with the Polk County Soil & Water Conservation District, was on hand for the broadcast and demonstration, and said the project is also about water volume control, and should help prevent flooding and erosion.

During part of the demonstration, crews poured water from a large hose onto the pavers to show how water seeps in between the pavers and into the ground.

Once the first phase is complete, which is consisted of rebuilding the northern half of the parking lot, crews will begin on phase two and the reconstruction of the southern half of the parking lot.

Part of the project will also include removal of the raised berms along Fifth Street, and replace them with bioretention cells, which Warner described as depressed areas that will collect runoff. Those cells will be filled with a mix of sandy soil and plants to help absorb water.

Funding for the project has come from a variety of sources, including more than \$300,000 from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, \$100,000 from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the city’s general fund and storm sewer funds.

Warner said holding the Facebook Live event and using social media helps city staff better engage with residents about projects and other happenings in city government.

“It helps us to better tell our story and answer questions from consumers,” Warner said.