

# Alley May Go Porous In City Pilot Program

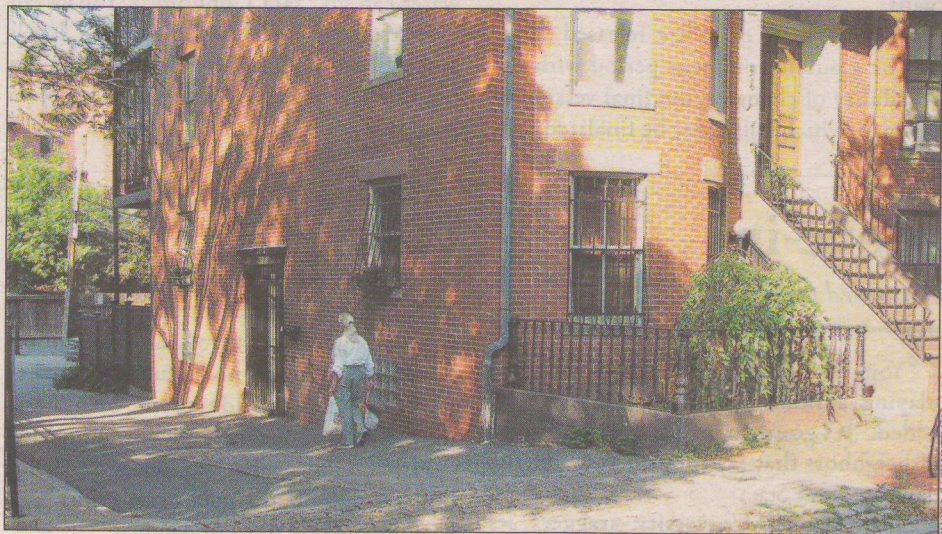


PHOTO: ZACK HUFFMAN

*The proposed location for a porous alley*

**by Zack Huffman**  
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The city has its eye on the South End for a pilot program that would repave public alleyways with porous material to improve drainage and replenish the neighborhood's depleted groundwater.

The Department of Public Works (DPW) has identified Public Alley 543, which connects Holyoke Street with West Canton Street, as the tentative test loca-

tion, pending the response from abutters.

In theory, the porous alley paving will allow more rainwater to seep into the ground and then be redirected into the water system.

“Basically, the object is to take an alley and put in a section of pervious pavement,” said Elliott Laffer, executive director of the Boston Groundwater Trust. “Beneath that, there is a structure that would hold the

*Continued on page 8*

# Alley

*continued from page 7*

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water and let it trickle out.”

The asphalt would have fewer binders in it, which is what would normally seal the paving and keep out most water. By combining the use of pervious paving material with sub-level filtration material, rainwater can more effectively be filtered into the ground and slowly be fed back into the water table.

“Historically what we’ve tried to do with rainwater is get it away from us. Sort of the idea behind sewers and catch basins is that rain is something that should be taken away,” said Laffer. “We’ve now realized that maybe that isn’t always the best idea.”

Para Jayasinghe, DPW city engineer, said that ideally, the city would begin the design work this fall and begin construction next April, once winter is over. Construction is expected to last 10 to 12 weeks.

“We hope to be completed by June or July,” said Jayasinghe.

Once completed, the site will be monitored for the following year to determine what the impacts are on the levels and quality of the groundwater.

“If we’re successful, we’d like to slowly expand that program,” said Jayasinghe. “This is critical stuff, and we want to make sure it works. The whole purpose is to recharge the groundwater.”

The project is estimated to cost \$500,000 with the state’s Department of Environmental Protection contributing about \$300,000, the city spending about \$175,000 and the Groundwater Trust paying about \$25,000.

“What we’re contributing is additional monitoring,” said Laffer. “We’ll be monitoring in the alley before and after construction so that we can see if the water levels stay up after rainfall and if it stays up longer.”

The pilot is still in its infancy stages. Before design work can start, the city will be meeting with residents to see if there are any major concerns.

“If there’s some issue that folks haven’t thought of then we’ll have to look at another location,” said Jayasinghe.