

## News Spotlight

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### Down the road, brick is back

 By NATHAN GILL  
 The Kansas City Star

Remember when paved roads actually contained ... paving stones? Maybe not.

For most of the last century, that kind of construction hit a brick wall.

Cities tore out their bricks or covered them with asphalt, looking to cut costs and do away with the time-consuming labor that brought street crews to their hands and knees.

No more.

Over in Lawrence, on two blocks of Ohio Street, crews are peeling back the asphalt and going back to brick. In Liberty, a brick intersection has been laid bare.

Across the nation, other cities are doing the same thing, hoping to reclaim the sense of place they sacrificed — perhaps too willingly — to the automobile. Never mind the bumpy reputation of bricks and their jarring price.

"It really does almost transport you back to a different time," said Burdett Loomis, who lives in Lawrence's bountifully bricked Old West Lawrence neighborhood.

No one wants to brick over Interstate 70, of course, and drivers are unlikely to accept brick on high-traffic thoroughfares. But in the right places, bricks can bring a bit of warmth to the urban landscape.

Placed by hand with precision and care, bricks are colorful items that people can hold and understand, said former local resident Glen LeRoy, dean of architecture and design at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield, Mich.

"It is a very humane, tactile, comfortable scale for a human being," LeRoy said.

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Bricks have paved American roads since the first European ships arrived. Bricks used to ballast ships later became the building blocks of early roads, said Michael Heitzman, an assistant director of the National Center for Asphalt Technology at Auburn University.

"In the horse-and-buggy days, it was very useful in urban areas," said Heitzman, who has spent almost 30 years studying transportation materials.

Brick remained in vogue until the turn of the 20th century, Heitzman said, when machinery was developed to lay asphalt and concrete. From the 1920s to '40s, asphalt and concrete became popular because they were cheaper and easier to build and provided a smoother ride to automobiles.

By the 1960s, Heitzman said, cities began paving over their old brick streets instead of maintaining them.

According to the Auburn center, 96 percent of paved streets in the United States are now surfaced with asphalt.

"Asphalt is going to be much smoother than the best brick street," he said. "The labor cost alone would deter most brick construction."

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When cities stopped using brick, they put cost over aesthetics. Brick streets can cost three to four times as much as asphalt, but the difference is narrowing. The price of asphalt has risen 53 percent since last year, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Now, if they can keep costs within reason, some communities — from Orlando, Fla., to Iowa City to Holton, Kan. — are embracing brick.

"It evokes quality and workmanship that asphalt can never do," said LeRoy, the architecture dean. "It gets us mentally back to an era of city development that is more lively and colorful and active."

In Lawrence, a state grant is financing 80 percent of the \$670,000 brick reclamation project in the 600 and 700 blocks of Ohio Street. To cut costs further, the city was able to salvage about 75 percent of the excavated bricks.

Until recently, those 105-year-old bricks were last seen through cracks in deteriorated pavement.

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