

Groundwater Mystery Is Being Unraveled



Repair work at the Copley Square Hotel could solve a groundwater mystery.

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Work is underway at the Copley Square Hotel to possibly solve the mysteriously low groundwater levels in the area.

The Boston Groundwater Trust (BGWT) has been monitoring the intersection of Exeter Street and Huntington Avenue in recent months as groundwater levels have

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been slowly depleting.

There are two well monitors close to the intersection, and historically both have detected groundwater close to the 3-foot elevation mark, which may shift depending on rainfall. In January, both monitors detected a drop closer to 1 foot above sea level, according to a BGWT report.

Although the water table in the area has typically been lower than other parts of the city, the most recent dearth reflects the lowest measured level since the trust began monitoring the intersection in 2001, according to Elliott Laffer, executive director of the BGWT.

It has been difficult for the trust to pinpoint the cause of low levels due to a number of different events that took place in the area over the last month.

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) found a leak along a turnpike drain line that could have contributed to a loss of groundwater. There was also a possibility that the low levels from dewatering related to a nearby piling repair project.

MassDOT repaired the leak and the repair job was completed, halting the dewatering process. Despite this, the groundwater levels contin-

ued to plummet.

In January, the Copley Square Hotel was issued a permit by the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) for emergency repair work for the building's foundation, which could have potentially impacted the groundwater, according to Laffer.

Stephen Cullen, general manager for the Copley Square Hotel, said that renovation work was still underway in the building's basement. He also confirmed that the hotel was aware of the potential for that work to impact local groundwater.

On July 22, the hotel pulled a permit from ISD to repair the existing recharge system, which should bring the water table back up, assuming there are no other causes for the draught.

Despite the low levels, Laffer said that it should not hinder new projects slated for the area, such as the expansion of Copley Place and 40 Trinity Place.

"All projects that do work below ground have to certify that they've been designed so that they can't lower the water level," said Laffer, noting that older properties, such as the Copley Square Hotel, are more likely to be negatively affected if water levels remain low for too long.

Laffer said that he is hopeful that the Copley Square Hotel basement renovation will prove to be the groundwater culprit.