

Groundwater Trust Loses Longtime Leader

by Zack Huffman
Courant News Writer

Elliott Laffer is stepping down as executive director of the Boston Groundwater Trust after 10 years.

Laffer, 65, said that he decided to resign from his role just as his wife retired from 40 years as an elementary school teacher.

"It's time for us to get ready for the next stage in our lives," he said.

Christian Simonelli, who has worked with the trust for well over a decade, has been tapped to step in as the new executive director.

"He supervised the installation of every well we've put in," said Laffer. "He knows the network better than anybody. I think there will be an enormous amount of continuity but with a fresh perspective. I'm very confident that Christian is going to be terrific in the job."



Elliott Laffer

Laffer said that he will remain with the trust to continue working on zoning matters and to compile a history of the organization.

The Boston Groundwater

Trust was first created in 1986, but had no funding and fell into inactivity by the start of the 1990s. In 1997, Mayor Thomas

Continued on page 14

SEPTEMBER 19, 2014

Laffer

continued from page 1

Menino re-established the commission and committed funding.

The purpose of the trust is to monitor the groundwater levels in downtown neighborhoods, which is important when preserving the wood pilings that many of Boston's historic buildings were constructed upon.

In 2004, the state stepped in and providing additional funding, which allowed the trust to hire its first full-time employees, which included the creation of the executive director position.

Since that time, Laffer has overseen the installation of hundreds of new monitoring wells, establishing a network of 816 monitoring locations.

"He's done a spectacular job," said Howard Kassler, chair of the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay. "He's been a rock for the community. He's a visionary and has really quietly and unassumingly done a fantastic job bringing a subject that people weren't aware of to the forefront and helping preserve and protect so many vital aspects of life in the Back Bay."

Laffer said that the key to the trust's success has been in fostering collaborative relationships with residents, developers and local government in addressing the problem of low groundwater.

"People have been very supportive since I've been here," he said. "It has been very gratifying to see that people understand that we can do something about this. We can look at this in a positive way without arguing with each other."