Although Boston hasn’t seen much snow this year, rainfall has made up for it, and the Boston Groundwater Trust says the level of precipitation has been steady, and groundwater levels have remained normal.

As the City of Boston was being developed, timber was used to shore up buildings that sat on shifting silt, a result of Boston’s foundation atop unstable wetlands. Underneath the wood holding up about 6,000 buildings in Boston is the city’s groundwater supply, which can fluctuate from year to year depending on how much rain and snowfall the city sees.

According to Christian Simonelli, Executive Director of the Boston Groundwater Trust, it’s too soon to know for sure if the lack of snowfall has affected the groundwater in Boston, but says things are looking positive.

“Despite the fact that little snow has fallen, Boston was well above for precipitation in 2018. Overall the year was very positive for groundwater levels. We just started well readings for 2019 and so far have not seen anything out of the ordinary. Perhaps worth revisiting sometime in the Spring after we’ve completed a couple of reading sets.”

According to the Boston Water and Sewer Commission, the average rainfall in Boston...

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Some Sweets Will Be Missing on Valentine’s Day

By Connor Batsimm

Sweethearts candies might be difficult to find this Valentine’s Day; the New England Confectionary Company (Necco) went bankrupt last May, meaning that their classic conversation hearts will be absent from stores this year.

Lack of Snow Is Not Harming Groundwater

by Caitlin Russell

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Groundwater
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during 2018 was 51.78 inches, compared to an average of 32.57 in 2017 and 30.48 in 2016.
The decline of the city’s water levels has caused the timber piles beneath buildings’ foundations to deteriorate, especially in the Back Bay. When groundwater declines, the timber is left exposed to the air, which can cause it to rot.

Over the years, manmade alterations to the city have shifted the flow of storm water that would recharge the city’s groundwater and continue to hold up the timber piles beneath the buildings. In 2006 the Groundwater Conservation Overlay District was created to preserve Boston’s groundwater levels and to “protect and enhance the city’s historic neighborhoods and structures, and otherwise conserve the value of its land and buildings; reduce surface water runoff and water pollution; and maintain public safety.” This law requires developers to meet certain standards if they wish to build in the overlay district. They must demonstrate to the Zoning Board of Appeals that the planned development conforms with the Groundwater Conservation Overlay District law, and must install a groundwater collection and recharge system for any development covered by the zoning law.

Sweethearts
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Conversation hearts are not gone for good, as Ohio-based Spangler Candy Company acquired the rights to the candy and will be able to begin producing them prior to Valentine’s Day 2020, but Boston’s days as a confectionary manufacturer are over. While this might be exciting news for local chocolate manufacturers, it marks the end of a Boston-area candy empire dating back to 1901, when Necco’s first factory was constructed at Fort Point.

When Necco set up shop at Fort Point, over a century before the Seaport’s renaissance as Boston’s innovation center, it was among the first factories built in the neighborhood, following a massive construction project that leveled the neighborhood’s hill, freeing up the land for business. Just one year later, the factory became the largest complex devoted entirely to candy production in the country, with four five-story buildings between Summer and Melcher Streets. The plant specialized in shipping and storing sugar and molasses, and often worked with the nearby Domino Sugar factory. The facility even contained private roads named after the new business, including Necco Street, Necco Court, and Necco Place.

Conversation heart dates back to 1866, when Chase and Company, the Boston-based confectionary company which later became Necco, invented a stamp-like machine capable of pressing text onto candy. “Though the machine was used on a number of different shaped candies, including horseshoe, postcard, and baseball shapes, it wasn’t until the introduction of heart shaped candies in 1901 that the concept took off.

At its peak popularity Necco manufactured approximately 100,000 pounds of conversation hearts per day. In addition to domestic sales, the company also sent their confessions to soldiers fighting overseas during World War I, and for those with loved ones back home, the conversation hearts were a particularly popular choice.

Last summer, the brick and beam warehouses that make up the former Necco complex were purchased by General Electric (GE) and are set to undergo a $200 million renovation. While the building which once displayed the Necco sign will be left more or less unchanged, under the ownership of the Boston Wharf Company, the buildings surrounding it will become part of the new GE campus. GE also plans to renovate the Necco Court bridge, a four-story interior bridge dating back to the days when the area was still candy production central.

For couples, friends, and elementary school classes looking for Valentine’s Day gifts this year, the conversation heart is no longer an option. And walking through the newly cosmopolitan Seaport, there is little evidence of the candy manufacturer that once put the neighborhood on the map; even the Necco sign is gone, replaced by the new iconic Boston Wharf Company sign. But when you’re shopping for assorted chocolate samples, remember the turn of the century sweethearts who celebrated their love with a now extinct Boston confection.