

Laffer Named Director Of Groundwater Trust

by Adam Martignetti
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For the first time in its history, the Boston Groundwater Trust will have a full-time, paid employee to lead the group, which is responsible for monitoring low water levels that threaten the wooden pilings beneath many of the city's historic buildings.

Elliott Laffer, a longtime community activist and member of the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay (NABB), was hired as the group's new executive director, effective August 15.

Since the Trust was revived in late 1997, a volunteer board of trustees appointed by Mayor Thomas Menino has run the group. However, facing increased responsibilities that include reporting on over 250 groundwater observations wells, board members began lobbying for a permanent full-time staff earlier this year.

"There was a feeling that the trust needed someone devoted full-time to make sure everything goes right: that the wells are



Elliott Laffer

installed right, that the readings are taken regularly, that information is disseminated to the right people," said Laffer.

Laffer will serve largely as the public face for the trust, interacting with government bodies and the public. He said he has already been to several consulting ses-

sions between developers and the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

"My job is to keep the issue front and center where it belongs," said Laffer.

Due largely to the advocacy efforts of the Trust, both city and

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state agencies, including the Boston Water and Sewer Commission (BWSC), the MBTA and the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, have launched a collaborative effort to address the groundwater problem.

For example, the BWSC has performed numerous dye tests – injecting color liquid into the ground – in order to identify where the groundwater may be leaking from the water table. The MBTA also commissioned an engineering study of its Southwest Corridor tunnel to see if it may have leaks.

“I think the government bodies recognize the importance of this issue. I think they have a very strong commitment to understanding the problem. I believe there is a commitment to fix it,” said Laffer. “My goal is to be part of the fixing.”

Laffer’s experience with

groundwater dates back to the early 1980s when he served on an advisory committee for the 500 Boylston Street project. At that time, the group established precedent-setting guidelines which mandated that groundwater observation wells be installed around the site and that water levels not drop below a certain level during construction.

Laffer has also served on NABB’s groundwater committee and said his training as an engineer will help him understand some of the technical issues that arise during groundwater discussions.

“I’m delighted we were able to make an agreement with Elliott,” said Trust co-chair Tim Mitchell. “His capacity to help us move forward in carrying out our mission is significant.”

“I’m grateful to the city for making this particular piece of funding available for us,” he added.

For now, the Trust will rent office space from the Back Bay Association.