

Mayor Menino Announces Groundwater Overlay District and EPA Grant



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Mayor Thomas M. Menino today unveiled four major initiatives in the city's continued efforts to address groundwater depletion in Boston's historic neighborhoods. Chiefly among them was the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU), a collaboration with several city and state agencies including the state Office of Commonwealth Development, the Boston Groundwater Trust, the MBTA, Mass Turnpike Authority and Boston Water and Sewer, among others.

"The issue of groundwater depletion isn't limited to one neighborhood or one agency," Mayor Menino said. "It is an issue that affects all of us. I want to thank everyone here for working in this partnership with the city to address this serious issue."

The signing of the MOU marks the first time these agencies will have formalized a working relationship.

"The Commonwealth is committed to working with the City of Boston to improve groundwater levels in the city," Doug Foy, Secretary of the Commonwealth Development said. "The state will do what it can to improve existing conditions and will design future projects with groundwater protection in mind."

Besides signing the MOU Mayor Menino signed legislation that expands the jurisdiction of the Boston Groundwater Trust. Also the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) unveiled a proposed groundwater overlay district that will be incorporated into zoning and the institutionalized recharge requirements in the development review process by the BRA. An award of appropriation by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and a new Declaration of Trust that was signed by all parties were also unveiled.

Mayor Menino had previously filed an order to amend the original 1986 Declaration of Trust, which limited the area to only a few neighborhoods. The Trust will now expand to include the entire city. The Boston City Council passed the order on September 14th and Mayor Menino signed it today.

Currently there are more than 600 wells from which groundwater levels are monitored on a regular basis by the Boston Groundwater Trust. At least 100 more will be added this fall.

"With the BRA Groundwater Conservation Overlay District, development projects within the overlay area will be studied for their potential effects on groundwater so that the impacts of these projects can be minimized," Mayor Menino said.

The BRA Groundwater Conservation Overlay District will apply to all projects with new structures covering more than 50 feet of the lot area or if excavating below seven feet below the city base to obtain a conditional permit through the ZBA.

"We are proud of the great leadership Mayor Menino has shown on this issue. The proposed overlay district will give the BRA even greater ability to protect the city groundwater levels. We applaud our colleagues at the state for joining us in this effort," BRA Director Mark Maloney said.

"The zoning piece helps bring the BRA into the solution and gets at smaller projects that tend to fly under the radar screen but cause big problems," Elliott Laffer, Executive Director of the Boston Groundwater Trust, said.

Ira Leighton, Deputy Regional Administrator of the EPA presented the award to Mayor Menino. The award is a \$192,400 grant to the City of Boston that will help fund the Boston Groundwater Trust, such as a pamphlet for homeowners on groundwater issues and available resources; the development of a homeowner education program; construction of additional groundwater monitoring wells and research for alternatives to underpinning buildings and the analysis of fill samples in particular areas. The city will develop the final projects for final approval by the EPA.

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