

Unbalanced Trees and Climate Change helps Archeologist: A roundup of environmental happenings from ecoRI News

An Unfair Tale of Two Tree Canopies

At the corner of John and Benefit streets on Providence's East Side, the tree equity score — a measure that indicates whether there are enough trees in specific neighborhoods for everyone to experience the health, economic and climate benefits that trees provide — is a perfect 100.

Across the river, the blocks stretching from the Jewelry District to South Providence along Eddy Street score among the worst in the state at 63.

Areas with low tree canopy today often correlate to areas that were historically redlined or are home to large proportions of people of color.

Recent investments have advanced green infrastructure in some spaces, but not all investment is put in the places that need it most.

In early September, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management handed out 1,000 free trees. Within a week, all the trees had been claimed. But, according to Vrinda Mathur, an industrial design graduate student at the Rhode Island School of Design and a Maharam Fellow with Social Enterprise Greenhouse, these trees may not be getting to the places that need them most.

She said this style of program presents “logistical or administrative” issues. The trees were available for pick up only, which can make it difficult for those without a car to take advantage of the program.

Alerting neighborhood groups or posting signs in community centers could help spread the word, she added, and get trees to the state's most exposed urban areas.

Tree-planting programs must be “citizen-led,” Mathur said. Community members take on a years-long task of tree maintenance with limited immediate reward. This puts areas with a lot of renters — who may not care about multiyear investment — and low-income residents — who may not be able to spend time and money on such a project — at a disadvantage.

“I think the solution really isn't just coming in and planting trees,” said Cassie Tharinger, executive director of the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program, a Providence-focused street-tree stewardship program. “There are real structural and material barriers. ... What has to happen is shifting and tackling that.”

If you'd like to check out your neighborhood's Tree Equity Score, visit <https://www.treeequityscore.org/map/#10.5/41.8368/-71.4256>

In Bizarre Twist, Climate-Fueled Storms Do Excavation Work for Archaeologists

Coastlines are used to steady change, slow cycles of erosion and revegetation. They have a “self-healing mechanism,” according to Tim Ives, the principal archaeologist with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission. That mechanism stabilizes the shores and, as a result, keeps the region’s archaeological record safely buried.

But in late October 2012, Superstorm Sandy stripped away that protective layer and exposed the old coastal terrain. Artifacts dating back more than 4,000 years — from revolutionary-era French coins to rings of “fire-reddened” stone to quartz projectiles and chipping debris — were suddenly sitting in the open.

“I could literally walk and find piles of stone that someone had worked thousands of years ago,” Ives said. “When these coastal storms hit, they give us a timed opportunity to get in there and add more pages to the human story that we didn’t know had been written.”

On Block Island, Sandy was a game changer, according to Ives. Archaeologists identified 163 exposed deposits all around the island. Pressed for time and funding, the archaeologists tested 20 percent of the deposits and excavated nearly 600 test pits in locations scattered around New Shoreham.

“We didn’t realize that the entire coastline was basically one nonstop archaeological site, but it is,” Ives said.

Charlestown in Quandary Over Quarry

Frequent blasting and loud industrial trucks were just some of the complaints voiced by residents during a September Zoning Board of Review meeting about the proposed expansion of a quarry on Alton Carolina Road.

During a Sept. 7 special meeting, the Zoning Board of Review took public comment about the Route 91 operation. The business, Charlestown Farms LLC, was served with a violation notice in July when town officials found the quarry violated the local zoning code. The gravel company was engaged in sand washing and processing off-site material without the proper permits and had expanded its operations onto property not zoned for extractive activity, according to town officials.

An attorney for Charlestown Farms appealed the violation during a Sept. 1 special meeting of the Zoning Board of Review. At its most recent meeting, the board voted unanimously, 5-0, to reject the appeal.

Brenda Pater, a lifelong resident of Charlestown, recalled childhood memories when the gravel pit was a smaller, quieter mom-and-pop operation. But the blasting in recent years, she said, has gotten out of hand.

“I have to say I called the Town Hall for the first time in my life about three months ago because I thought we had an earthquake,” she told the board.

In its final decision the board found Charlestown Farms provided insufficient evidence for appeal.

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