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Nature will be at work to enhance health, environment, economy in Providence's West End

PROVIDENCE – Just in time for Earth Day 2017, work is happening this week on the Dexter Street Nature at Work Project. The green infrastructure project will simultaneously benefit the environment and the economy, while also enhancing social aspects of the community. The work will be performed by city residents participating in a Groundwork Rhode Island green jobs workforce development program.

The pilot project is funded through the Rhode Island Department of Health's Climate Change Program, Brown University's Swearer Center, and Groundwork Rhode Island via the City of Providence's Health Equity Zone program, to help improve public health, air quality, stormwater management, and issues with urban heat. The project serves as a model for future green infrastructure projects in Providence and throughout Rhode Island. It represents a grassroots effort with the state and nonprofit partners working collaboratively to develop nature-based solutions to mitigate the effects of climate change.

"Green infrastructure is a wonderful solution for the impacts of climate change on public health," said Julia Gold, Climate Change Program Manager at the Rhode Island Department of Health. "It offers numerous co-benefits, such as improving air quality, cooling the natural and built environments, reducing flooding, enhancing streetscapes, and helping to mitigate climate change by absorbing CO₂."

Residents in the West End neighborhood identified Dexter Street as a source of many environmental problems. Water often pools during rainstorms and there are very few street trees. Working with a crew from Groundwork Rhode Island, the updates to Dexter Street will feature new trees, additional landscaping, and curb cuts to help direct stormwater into the ground, rather than the storm drains.

"Groundwork RI is excited to be a part of this project that really serves two roles - one is improving the environment for West End residents. The second is providing a job training opportunity for local residents who are interested in work in the environmental sector. It's truly a win-win," said Amelia Rose, Executive Director of Groundwork Rhode Island.

The benefits of green infrastructure are many. Green infrastructure cleans air and water by using plants and soils to filter out pollution. It protects neighborhoods from stormwater issues by absorbing rain and reducing flooding. It improves the economy by reducing local utility bills and creating local jobs. Green features also cool extreme heat conditions by replacing hard surfaces that hold heat and creating additional shade. Green infrastructure enhances community wellness by creating a more attractive and welcoming urban environment.

"This installation is an excellent example of how we can bring nature into our communities to manage stormwater, enhance our common spaces, and improve the wellbeing of residents," said Johnathan Berard, state director at Clean Water Action and co-chair of the Rhode Island Green Infrastructure Coalition. "We are very excited about supporting projects like this that make our communities more livable and resilient."



Partners on this project include the Rhode Island Department of Health Climate Change Program, the Rhode Island Green Infrastructure Coalition, Clean Water Action, Groundwork Rhode Island, West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation, West Broadway Neighborhood Association, Environmental Justice League of Rhode Island, and Brown University's Swearer Center, with assistance from the City of Providence.

To learn more about green infrastructure and other Nature at Work projects throughout the state, visit the Green Infrastructure Coalition's website, <http://greeninfrastructureri.org>.