

The Story of the Circus Lot

Since 2018, town volunteers, staff and officials have been doing the work to get us to the point we are today- a February 26, 2024 Town Meeting where residents will have the opportunity to vote on if they would like to buy back a parcel of land along the Pawcatuck River.

The "Circus Lot" is the locally referenced name for this 5.6 parcel of land that sits along the federally designated Wild and Scenic Pawcatuck River. It is currently an underutilized property that could become a wonderful community asset that allows for outdoor recreation for people of all ages and ability. It will offer public access to the water and enhance public safety. The preliminary concept plans shows that the site could host walking trails, fishing areas, a kayak launch, a recreational field, and a playground area. No decisions on the final plans for the park will be made without further community engagement on this potential community park.



The project could also serve as an example of how a municipality can utilize and improve a neglected property, within a flood zone to create a useful, public amenity without displacing any of the flood storage capacity of the site. The vegetation on the site is now dominated by invasive species. A goal is to remove the invasive species, restore the riparian zone along the river, and the upland woodland & riverine grassland habitats, which would enhance the environmental quality and buffering capability, along with educational engagement opportunities.

This parcel is currently owned by the Town of Westerly; however, as the site is not used for its original purpose, per a reverted clause in the deed, Stonington has the right to purchase it back for \$35,000. It has been with this goal in mind that, to-date, there has been a topography and wetlands survey, Phase I and partial Phase II environmental testing (see summary below), a preliminary concept plan created, initial funding secured and community engagement. All these steps have yielded positive results and plans are now underway to take the final legal steps to purchase the land.

Information on the Monday, February 26 2024 Town Meeting can be found [here](#). The vote is solely focused on purchasing the land back from Westerly. If residents choose to approve this purchase, the next step would be further community engagement so plans for the park can be completed, preliminary ground work by the Department of Public Works and working to secure external funding.

Summary Overview- Environmental Reports and Testing at the Circus Lot

In 2020, Kropp Environmental was hired to do a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment on the Circus Lot property. The Phase I did not identify significant on-site contaminant sources; some potential off-site sources were identified, but based on data reviewed, no evidence of significant impacts from on or off-site sources was found. Kropp subsequently collected a sample of the fill soil from the area outside the existing well pump house to determine if the material was polluted. The soil sample was tested for multiple parameters including petroleum, volatile organics, various hydrocarbons, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and metals. Testing did not find evidence of pollution; there were **no detections** of metals or hydrocarbon compounds above background (trace concentrations) and no volatile organics, petroleum compounds, PCBs, or other contaminants.

Kropp also collected a groundwater sample from a depth of 14.5 ft below ground in a PVC pipe that Kropp believed might have once been used as a water level observation point. The groundwater sample was tested for the same compounds as the soil. The testing detected low levels of some compounds commonly found in PVC well materials and cement. The sample also had very low levels of petroleum similar to gasoline, at or below laboratory detection limits and drinking water standards. **None of the compounds detected in the groundwater sample represent a concern relative to using the park for recreational purposes.** The levels were orders of magnitude below regulatory criteria.

Westerly Water provided the Town with chemical test data from when they were pumping the well (well last pumped in 2002 and last sampled in 2003). The water testing included a very long list of compounds, significantly more than the Phase II test, and **none were detected above natural background.**

Neither the Phase I, or the soil/groundwater testing found evidence suggesting that the Narragansett Electric property (18 Canal Street, Westerly) had impacted site soil or groundwater. Although multiple tests of the well by Westerly did not find any evidence this had occurred - there was a concern that it could happen in the future if the well was pumped at a high rate or for a long period of time. The Town of Westerly settled a lawsuit with Narragansett Electric that prohibits use of the site for a public water supply. The well pump has been removed and the piping that formerly connected the well to the system has been cut and capped. We have requested that Westerly properly abandon the well prior to the transfer.

There was also no evidence found to suggest that historic spills or tank leakage at the Dahl Oil property had resulted in significant impacts to the site, or in any way prevents future use as a park. The trace levels of petroleum found in the groundwater sample collected by Kropp may be related to historic spillage on the adjacent Dahl Oil property. However, the Dahl Oil property was investigated and successfully remediated under CT DEEP oversight.