



# GIC News Release

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**For immediate release**  
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## **Westerly residents are invited to weigh in on strategies for expanding tree cover to reduce heat and stormwater**

Residents of all ages are encouraged to attend an open house event on May 28th to learn about Westerly's tree canopy coverage and help identify potential strategies for tree-planting actions they would like to see the town take to reduce flooding and extreme heat. The [Green Infrastructure Center](#) (GIC) is partnering with the Town of Westerly to host a public open house on trees and resilience on Wednesday, May 28th, from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. at the Westerly Library Terrace Room on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor (44 Broad Street, Westerly, RI 02891). A free tour of historic Wilcox Park will be led by Park Superintendent Alan Peck immediately following from 6:30-7:00 PM.

The open house marks the culmination of the town's participation in the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Division of Forest Environment (DFE) [Urban Forests for Rhode Island Technical Assistance Program](#), funded by the Inflation Reduction Act through the USDA Forest Service. GIC and DFE are partnering to support tree canopy mapping, planning, management, planting, policy development, and education in select Rhode Island municipalities. The Town of Westerly was selected through a competitive application process and began the work in September 2024 alongside local nonprofit partners, including the [Southern RI Conservation District](#), [Westerly Land Trust](#), and [Westerly Library and Wilcox Park](#).

The project mapped tree cover in the town and found that Westerly has 52% tree canopy cover. However, the town's urban service area, which represents the most densely populated area, has 35% canopy cover. GIC's analysis found that not all neighborhoods have the same tree cover; for instance, the Downtown and Main Street neighborhood has as little as 12% tree canopy cover. A third of the land area in the urban service boundary is covered with impervious surfaces. This includes asphalt, pavement, and other impervious materials that do not allow water to be absorbed, thereby contributing to flooding and excessive heat. The Town established a goal to increase tree canopy cover in the urban area to the new goal of 37% by 2035. This will provide more shade, soak up stormwater, clean the air, and make the town resilient. Increased coverage will be achieved by adopting several strategies, including focusing tree-planting efforts in low-canopy neighborhoods and adopting standards and policy updates that promote tree cover and disincentivize impervious cover.

"The Town is grateful for the expertise provided by the Green Infrastructure Center and RI DEM as we look to grow the size of our tree canopy. Trees help provide a welcoming and calming atmosphere while playing a critical role in the natural environment by reducing heat, absorbing and cleaning

stormwater, and improving the air we breathe,” said Westerly Town Manager Shawn M. Lacey. “We look forward to sharing the tree canopy committee’s work with the public during the open house and receiving ideas from residents.”

Valuing the benefits of the urban forest helps us better understand the contribution of trees and the ecosystem services they provide, such as cleaner water, air, shade, stormwater uptake, and aesthetic value. According to the GIC’s Director, Karen Firehock, “Homeowners, developers, and city planners make decisions about our urban forests daily. Everyone should understand that when we lose trees, we may be increasing flooding and water pollution. We need to understand where to conserve trees and where to plant new ones to reduce urban flooding, cool cities, clean the air, and provide habitat and recreation for people, birds, and wildlife.” Maps provided to the cities show where trees can be planted to create the greatest benefits.

[Registration](#) encouraged. Can’t make it to the event, but still want to provide input? Fill out this brief [online survey](#). Please direct any questions about the open house event to Molly Henry at [mhenry@gicinc.org](mailto:mhenry@gicinc.org) or call 401-312-7857.

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*Founded in 2006, the Green Infrastructure Center is a nonprofit organization that assists communities in developing strategies for protecting and conserving their ecological and cultural assets, including wild and urban forests, rivers, wetlands, lakes and bays, soil, parks, and open spaces. The **GIC** conducts research, land-use planning, and land assessment and mapping to provide the tools communities need to protect and restore their green assets. For more information, visit [www.gicinc.org](http://www.gicinc.org)*

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