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## DEM cuts back on red tape for Westerly KeepSpace project

By Chris Keegan / The Westerly Sun



RIDEM agrees to streamline permitting for several KeepSpace projects, including Westerly mixed-use development.

The state's lead environmental agency has agreed to streamline permitting for several KeepSpace Communities projects throughout the state, including plans to bring mixed-use development to two sites in downtown Westerly.

The state Department of Environmental Management's recent announcement marks the first time DEM-related permits will be handled cooperatively — and could change the way community development projects are handled in the future. The decision was announced earlier this month by the public relations firm Im-aj Communications & Design Inc. on behalf of the projects' developers.

“The comprehensive team approach creates a new way for DEM to conduct business that is more efficient for the applicant and the agency,” DEM Director W. Michael Sullivan said in a statement provided by Im-aj. “The KeepSpace emphasis on environmental stewardship presented the perfect opportunity to implement this approach. The KeepSpace partners have embraced the streamlined approach and are excited about creating a new model for future projects.”

In Westerly, the Westerly Land Trust and Watch Hill Properties LLC, in tandem with the Charles Royce Family Foundation, have proposed a mixed-use “gateway” along the banks of the Pawcatuck River. Plans have been made for the site of two former gas stations and a used car dealership on Main Street to house a mix of housing, commercial and recreational space that enhances visual and physical access to the river.

A second site near the Westerly Train Station off Friendship and Canal Streets has also been

planned for redevelopment.

DEM's Chief of Technical and Customer Assistance Ronald Gagnon said Tuesday that permits encompassed by the agency's decision include wetlands and septic permits, as well as approvals sought through the Targeted Brownfields Assessment Program — a review process invoked when sites need environmental remediation.

The projects will be assigned a DEM Project Review Team, rather than each developer applying for permits separately — which is currently the standard.

“Typically with old gas stations, you have to make sure underground storage tanks are removed, and whether there have been any leaks,” Gagnon said. “If there's evidence of a past contamination, [the agency] would need to investigate and clean it up.”

Other Keepspace projects throughout the state include the reclamation of the Cranston Print Works historic mill; the Olneyville Housing Corporation's Woonasquatucket Greenway connector in Providence; and Pawtucket Citizens Development Corporation's proposed commuter rail stop(s) in Pawtucket and Central Falls.

*[Click here for more information on Keepspace.](#)*