

**GREEN BROOK FLOOD CONTROL COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

LOCATION: Middlesex

DATE: April 3, 2019

MEETING CONVENEED: 7:30PM

NOTE: Adequate notice of this meeting was provided informing the public of the time and place according to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Law (Chapter 231, P.L. 1975).

IN ATTENDANCE:

Raymond S. Murray . GBFCC Chairman	Clare Levane . Middlesex resident
Edward Bogan - Engineer, GBFCC	Mark Hardenburg - Piscataway
George Verwerides -Middlesex Cty Planning	John J. Sweeney - Middlesex
John Ferguson . South Plainfield	William Crosby . North Plainfield
Frank McArdle - North Plainfield	Jeanette DeJesus . resident
Paul Leso . Union County	Maria Staikopoulos . resident
Pat & Pauline Kline - residents	Glen & Claudia Zeller . residents
Alice Tempel . South Plainfield	Mark Kranz . Middlesex
Robert Greco . USACE NY District	Stacy Narvesen - Dunellen
Paul Woska . Middlesex	Jessica Dunne - Dunellen
Theodore Bassman . Scotch Plains	

MINUTES

The minutes from the February 6 meeting were approved. A copy of the approved minutes is available on the GBFCC website.

CORRESPONDENCE

Letter of appreciation from the Alliance for Action, a group that advocates for construction in New Jersey. This year marks their 45th year of advocacy.

The GBFCC maintains a correspondence file that is available for inspection as may be necessary and upon request.

TREASURER'S REPORT. Mr. Crosby

Most members have paid their bill for the year. Two counties, Union & Middlesex, have not paid as well as one municipality, Bound Brook remain outstanding.

We have four bills which were presented to us to be paid:

- 1) Grotto Engineering, our consulting engineer
- 2) Ray Murray for trip to Washington DC
- 3) Tina Totten for mailing out our meeting notices
- 4) Winning Strategies, our consulting federal government relations firm

The bills have been reviewed and found to be in order. A motion was made to approve payment of the bills. Motion carried.

Reports:

ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS - Robert Greco, Project Manager

Id begin by touching on the overall budget for the Green Brook Flood Risk Management Project. In FY2019 we are receiving \$29 million in federal funds. We were in the President's budget for \$5 million. It was plussed up by an additional \$24 million. We are at \$9.5 million in matching non-federal funds. We have received about \$7 million from the State of New Jersey thus far.

The overall project spans about 10 miles from the Borough of Bound Brook all the way up to the Upper Basin. The Borough of Bound Brook was completed in 2015 (Segment U, R & T) and received FEMA flood certification in 2016. Rates drastically dropped upon receiving that flood certification but took about 15 years.

We are currently working in Middlesex Borough and Green Brook Township. A much larger area than Bound Brook. The intention here is to try to speed up the process by requesting larger amounts of funds annually. On average, the Bound Brook portion of project received \$5 million per year. We are asking for about \$30 million per fiscal year for this portion of project as it is very large area.

A point worth noting is that if after construction is completed, should there be any issues, the Army Corp of Engineers comes back to fix the issue. We have a minor issue at the R-2 pump Station built in 2012 where there are some settlement issues. Will be on site tomorrow morning with NJDEP and Somerset County for a walk through of the pump station. Inspections have been done. Just wanted to bring out the point that even though we complete a project, it doesn't mean that we are completely off site.

Middlesex Borough

Right now, we are working in Middlesex, along South Lincoln Avenue. It is Segment C-2, Contract 1 Floodwall and an option to the floodwall, which was just awarded to Carbro,

Last year we only had enough real estate to award a portion. We obtained the real estate for the next section just recently and awarded it to Carbro in February 2019. This alignment is over 1,100 linear feet of floodwall. Carbro is actively working every day.

In FY2019, the goal is to award everything from the NJ Transit Raritan Valley Line complex, (there's a warehouse with trailers there now). This contract consists of a pump station, levee and a floodwall system schedule for late August 2019. Some minor real estate issues which we are trying to resolve with our real estate office.

In FY2020 we are going to award a contract to include a levee, floodwall and closure structures on South Lincoln and coming across South Lincoln over to the opposite end, just west of South Lincoln. We are in President's budget for FY2020 with \$20 million. It is important that if we have any real estate issues, we stay on top of it, so it does not slow the project down. We cannot hold funds from one year to next without obligating them or we risk losing that funding. Our real estate folks are making appraisals and meeting with property owners, it's a lot of work to keep things moving along. Need appraisals because we are impacting people's properties with the floodwall in certain areas.

To clarify the Federal fiscal year runs from October to the following September. For example, FY2018, spans from October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2019.

In FY2021, our goal is to award two segments of levees and two pump stations. The two pump stations will be a continuation of the H levee and then on the opposite bank, along Cap Lane, heading towards the library.

In FY2022, providing that we obtain funds, it will be a continuation of levee behind the library and floodwall crossing over route 28 and a continuation of levee by where the high school is. If we don't have real estate issues holding us up, we should be awarding a large contract here for FY2022.

For Area C & D, we are sending out rights of entry to property owners to be able to take geotechnical borings as well as determine if there are any hazardous materials down there. Sent out 26 rights of entry and received all of them back for the soil borings. Now we need to send out an additional 103 rights of entry for the surveyors to access properties to perform wetland delineation surveys.

Once completed, we must break this large area up into construction contracts. I'd like to break this up into \$30 million contracts. Guessing it will be three contracts; may be more or less. Figuring a rough estimate of design to begin in 2020, by 2023 we could have first construction contract ready to be put on the street. The last construction contract should be awarded in 2025. Assuming the funds continue to come through, we could be out of Middlesex by 2026.

Around 2024 . 2025, we will be having FEMA look at our plans and specifications for the project in order to certify the levees and at the subsequent completion of the project in about 2027, the flood insurance rates could drop in the whole area.

One other thing that I want to mention is that when we build portions of the project, we need to build it in such a manner as to not induce any flooding. For example, as we are putting in this floodwall, and a big flood event comes through, NJ DEP Land Use Regulatory Program (LURP) looks at construction sequencing and reviews the hydrology and hydraulics models. They want to make sure for each increment of construction that is put in, we are not creating additional flood heights on people's properties if a storm comes through. When they review the hydrology and hydraulics models, they expect to see no significant changes.

Right now, with one of the floodwalls in place, if a flood comes through, you are not protected. It is going to flood all around the floodwall. We do not have the funds to build this all at once but as we finish pieces, there will be some protection. If the levees are completed up near the high school, some people will get protection, but won't have complete protection until full job is finished. Again, we try to move as quickly as we can. Unfortunately, there are several hurdles, and this is a very time-consuming process.

Question: A resident asks for clarification on the map.

Mr. Greco explains the project consists of two levee systems, a floodwall, a bridge that possibly needs to be raised, and a pump station by the Regional Center towards the Dunellen side.

Question from resident: Will there be flood gates on Route 28?

Mr. Greco: Yes. On Route 28 there will be two flood gates. One right by the American Legion. We took out the diner because we need that for a detention pond for the pump station which will be built. When we award the construction contract in FY2022, it will include that pump station and the pump station already built over by B-1. South Lincoln will also have two closure gates, just before you hit Bound Brook. The closure gates will be installed when we award the contract in FY2020. That contractor will install the two closure gates.

Mr. Murray: Just to finish the idea you mentioned about levels of protection. Right now, Segment B-1 has a 40-year protection. Once we finish the project, the whole area will increase to a 150-year protection.

Mr. Greco: We characterize this project as 150-year level protection. There is what we call risk and uncertainty, so we build some additional height on the levees and the floodwalls, so you are actually getting more than 150-year level. In Bound Brook, when Hurricane Irene came through in 2011, we have a picture of the floodwall right by Brook Industrial and the water on the Raritan came within a foot and a half of the top and that was a 500-year storm.

In 2011, the Bound Brook levee system was not completed, and Bound Brook had about 4-feet of water on Main Street. They would have had much more water if the levee system hadn't been started.

Again, the focus is that as we build, we don't induce additional flooding. So, for example, if a 100-year storm hits and you have four-feet of water on your first floor. The levee we are building cannot cause you more than four feet of water. Very complex, and that is why the process is being built like "Swiss cheese". An example is along Lee Drive, we need to leave a gap until we build Segment H. The reason is that if we were to close this off, we would induce flooding on some homes.

Question from resident: On your chart, what does the various colors indicate?

Mr. Greco: The colors are simply a visual observation of how we may break up the construction contracts and subject to revision.

Right now, we have designers working and we have an issue with a property which is empty due to a tax issue. We could not award the whole construction contract. It forced us to break the construction sequence up and award smaller contracts so we can keep the project moving forward and are using the funds in the fiscal year as projected, without carrying funds into next fiscal year which would affect subsequent funding.

It's critical to keep momentum going or else we will lose the funding. We are constantly competing for funds across the whole country.

Question from resident: Over by the VFW, where you put in flood gate, will you be raising that bridge?

Mr. Greco: No. We will not be raising that bridge on Route 28 because we cannot do so without affecting about 25 properties. Showed that plan to the previous Mayor, and he also agreed it would not be acceptable to impact so many properties. Instead we put in the closure gates. It was one or the other.

Question from resident: I have a question about the part of the project that is labeled in purple. I am representing the Regency Heights Homeowners Association. We have 71 homes. We have a retention basin already which is how the development was designed. The property owners did receive the requests for the rights of entry, and there has been work out there for borings, etc. We didn't realize it was going to come so far up on the property. So, my question is, when the levee system which is being designed is completed, will it be on the common property? On the map she shows Mr. Greco where the detention basin is, explains where it is draining and asks if it will be blocked by the levee system.

Mr. Greco explains it will not be blocked because there will be outlet structures which will be designed underneath the levee.

Discussion continued about the intricate system to move water, especially during severe storms, which will involve bundle valves, swales, buried culvert pipes and how that works with the levee system and pump stations.

Ms. Tempel: A couple years back, I came to a meeting and there were already plans for that purple section. There was a berm supposed to be there.

Mr. Murray & Mr. Greco: Both said that was probably just a concept plan or possible idea, not actual construction design plans.

Ms. Tempel: Will all these improvements eliminate need for flood insurance or just reduce it?

Mr. Greco: In Bound Brook, FEMA recommends you maintain flood insurance, but the cost is greatly reduced. For example, some folks that were paying \$2,000 to \$2,500 are now paying \$200 to \$300.

Ms. Tempel: But it is not mandatory to keep the insurance?

Mr. Murray: It is going to depend on your mortgage company.

Comment: It will also depend on the map.

Mr. Hardenburg: I'm a property owner in Bound Brook. My flood insurance was more than \$3,000. It came down to just \$350. Same coverage.

Ms. Tempel: Is that because you were forced to carry it or because you wanted to carry it?

Mr. Hardenburg: There is no mortgage on this property, so I'm not forced to, but I want to. I feel it is cheap enough, it would be foolish not to carry the insurance at that price.

Mr. Murray: And believe me, that \$3,000 would seem cheap in some places. As the rates are going up and the federal subsidies are diminishing, people are seeing bills come through over \$4,000. As these nationwide events happen, the federal government is not going to stand behind fully supporting the program. There will still be some subsidy, but rates are going up by about 25% each year until they get to the point where the risk they are covering is commensurate with the fee they are getting. So, when you can get that kind of reduction in rates its worth keeping just for the piece of mind and that's what they suggest.

Other part of it, is it will be up to your mortgage company, but you can advocate for yourself and there's always another mortgage company out there. The mayor in Bound Brook was willing to advocate on behalf of residents to the mortgage companies, hoping to do that same here when we get the FEMA certification. FEMA certification is a long process, and even though we start before construction is completed, we are not going to get that certification until all of Middlesex Borough is complete.

Resident: Again, our association was built and designed specifically so we would not be paying flood insurance. We do have a letter from FEMA and any time I sell a property there, I give them that letter. This is not going to impact us, right?

Mr. Greco: No. No change in that.

Resident: Has this project, as a whole, affected property values at all?

Mr. Greco: I can't answer that.

Mr. Murray: I can give you a parenthetical examination. If you drive down Main Street in Bound Brook, there is a whole lot of building going on. None of that building would be going on if there wasn't flood protection in place. The redevelopment and apartment complexes that are being built, would not be being built if there wasn't flood protection.

Mr. Hardenburg: Again, I'm a property owner in Bound Brook and it is an area that flooded. Now that things have changed, the value of my property has gone up.

Mr. Greco: In Piscataway & South Plainfield, we have five structures that we are going to flood-proof by either raising the structure or eliminate basements and/or elevate utilities. There are not enough houses in that area to protect to make it feasible to put levees or floodwalls. Hoping to get that awarded in FY2019.

In Green Brook Township, there are also a number of structures along Route 22, some are commercial properties, which we are going to be looking at for non-structural treatments on the opposite side of the B-1 floodwall.

Upper Basin

We are reexamining the Upper Basin features. Upper Basin consists of *Segment M* - channel modifications along the Green Brook between Plainfield and North Plainfield, and two dry detention sites. *Segment O* which is the Connell Corporate Park & *Segment S* . in the Watchung Reservation.

Looking to determine if the detention basins are still engineeringly feasible, environmentally acceptable and economically justified. If any part of the project presents a problem, we need to document it in the validation report and then will have to look at other alternatives in the Upper Basin. Early May 2019, a short report is due out and then will follow with a series of reviews & meetings. If these detention basins are not feasible, the next step is a General Reevaluation Study.

Ms. Tempel: How does channelization of a stream provide protection?

Mr. Greco: It maintains the flow inside the stream, instead of letting it spill out.

Ms. Tempel: Will it be made of concrete?

Mr. Greco: No, probably riprap. NJ DEP wouldn't allow concrete. Riprap would only be placed where it is absolutely necessary and will require quite a bit of explanation.

Discussion and comments from several people continued about detention basin features, timing of parts of the project and how the design possibilities might change based on results of the validation study. Also discussed how the project has been viewed in past by different municipalities and how things have changed over the years.

QUESTIONS / COMMENTS FROM THE COUNTIES

Middlesex County

Just the fact that we continue to work with Somerset County on maintaining the levee. Contract up for renewal in November.

Union County

None.

Somerset County

Not represented at meeting.

GBFCC ENGINEER

None.

WINNING STRATEGIES (WSW)

Rob Zucker was not able to attend meeting but provided an update via Chairman Murray.

On March 5, Ray Murray and Bill Crosby traveled to Washington. Rep. Tom Malinowski was conducting a meeting at Winning Strategies. Nice opportunity to pitch our project in a small group setting. WSW also scheduled meetings with Office of Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman, Office of Sen. Bob Menendez, & Office of Sen. Cory Booker.

A bit of background regarding funding for the project. We were in the President's budget for \$5 million last year, but through multiple trips to Washington last year we were able to get the number plussed to \$29 million. Part of the reason for only getting \$5 million in those prior years was that we had been having issues that delayed progress, especially with real estate, so money that was not able to be used was cut. One goal moving forward was to avoid such delays and have designs in place so as money became available, we could take advantage of it.

Good news on March 11 and March 14, the Trump Administration released information on the proposed Fiscal Year 2020 budget. USACE has proposed \$25 million for the Green Brook project, a robust funding figure.

We will still look to have that number plussed and we did make that pitch with all the representatives when we were in Washington. Many of the staff members know a great deal about our project.

USACE is designing now for about \$30 million per year of federal dollars. Could look to make that \$40 million federal per year, but the matching State funding would also need to keep up with their cost share. The GBFCC may begin lobbying at the State level as well. It would mean a big jump for the State, but it is for the protection of life, it is the protection of property and it presents a significant cost savings the quicker we do it. Our project is the biggest project of this type on this side of the Mississippi.

We are also working to secure a walk-through of the project by Rep Malinowski and his staff, given that he was recently elected and would benefit from seeing it firsthand as he advocates for the effort through his work on annual appropriations and in his service on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

Finally, during March, Sen. Menendez met in Washington with both Col. Asbery of the USACE New York District and Major General Milhorn, Commanding General of the USACE North Atlantic Division. He raised the importance of the Green Brook project at each meeting and was given positive feedback on progress being made.

QUESTIONS FROM COMMISSIONERS & PUBLIC

Ms. Tempel: How long is levee / flood wall supposed to last?

Mr. Greco: About 75 to 100 years.

Ms. Tempel: Are you concerned about erosion on the sides and/or underneath?

Mr. Greco: We do monitor for erosion. That is also why the soil samples and surveys are critical at beginning of project.

Ms. Tempel: What happens after 100 years? Don't we worry about our descendants?

Mr. Murray: Yes, we certainly do. In the same way that some bridges need repair now, everything needs maintenance over time.

Ms. Tempel: Wondering if there is a plan to revisit the area in say 80 years to see what need to be done.

Mr. Murray: Municipalities and Counties maintain and oversee things every month.

Mr. Crosby: It has taken us 45 years to get to this point! Something that doesn't often get talked about is that we have had many groups come to us, even from China, to look at our project and how it was built. We have had every city/town along the Hudson River to see how things were done.

Mr. Greco: Forgot to mention earlier, a group of 24 engineering students will be coming to view the project in both the Upper Basin and in Middlesex Borough.

Mr. Murray thanked Middlesex Library for their hospitality. He asked each of the town representatives to confirm the availability of the venues for the upcoming meetings.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 8:55 PM

Upcoming 2019 GBFCC meeting dates:

Wednesday, June 5, 2019 - 7:30 PM

North Plainfield Community Center, 614 Greenbrook Rd, N Plainfield

Saturday, August 3, 2019

Memorial Service - American Legion in Middlesex

Wednesday, October 2, 2019 – 7:30 PM

Scotch Plains

Wednesday, December 4, 2019 – 7:30 PM

Plainfield Public Library