

**GREEN BROOK FLOOD CONTROL COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

LOCATION: Virtual Meeting

DATE: February 2, 2022

MEETING CONVENEED: 7:30PM

Chairman Murray opened the meeting and took role call along with leading the Pledge of Allegiance. He recited compliance with the Open Public Meeting Act.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Raymond Murray . Chairman . Green Brook	Joe Skupien . Somerset County
Paul Woska . Vice-Chair - Middlesex	Tom Genova . Bridgewater
William Crosby . Treasurer - N Plainfield	Daniel Sigmon . Dunellen
Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman	Harry Allen . N Plainfield
Carrienne Lee . Offices of BWC	Terri Briggs-Jones . Plainfield
Kari Osmond . Offices of BWC	Theodore Bassman . Scotch Plains
Mike Merola . Winning Strategies	Alice Tempel . South Plainfield
Alek Peterson . USACE NY District	John Ferguson . South Plainfield
Bethany McClanahan . USACE NY District	Christine Ead . Watchung
Jack Hoffman . NJDEP	Alexandra
Tom Slowinski . NJDEP	Clare
Rich O'Connor . Engineer, GBFCC	Hector Vargas
Doug Greenfield . Middlesex County	Jean Popper
Melonie Marano . Somerset County	Kathy
Valerie Bogart . Somerset County	Nancy Piwowar

SPECIAL COMMENTS

Chairman Murray welcomed Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman and her staff to the bi-monthly meeting. The Congresswoman recently announced an appropriation of \$496 million in a disaster recovery bill, as well as an additional \$3.2 million for a General Revaluation Report for the Upper Basin portion of the project.

Congresswoman Watson Coleman detailed the funding that she was able to secure for the project and the importance of seeing the project through to completion. Chairman Murray expressed gratitude for the Congresswoman's achievement in locking in this monumental funding allocation, as well as the support that the project has received from the entire Congressional delegation.

MINUTES

Both sets of December minutes were approved. Approved minutes are available on the GBFCC website.

CORRESPONDENCE

No external correspondence was received.

TREASURY REPORT

2022 dues have started to come in. The annual dues to the New Jersey Alliance for Action were approved for payment, along with the usual three bills. The treasurer's report is on the website.

ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS . Alek Peterson, Project Manager

Completed construction in Bound Brook with Segments U-R-T in the Lower Basin. Turned that portion of the project over to NJ DEP as the non-federal sponsor in 2016.

Began building in Middlesex with segments B1, B2, B3. There are now two ongoing construction contracts:

Segment C2; Contract 1: In process of closing that contract out. The flood walls are placed and finishing work has been done. Just waiting on the contractor to provide up-to-date As-Builts per our comments. Once we have that, we will be in a position to finish that contract.

Segments C1: Work is on-going. The base flood wall was placed and completed. Fencing was restored on the Lee Drive backyards. There will be some minor finishing work there in Spring with warmer temperatures. Work on the options continues. Carbro, our construction contractor, has basically finished work on the culvert through the railway embankment.

The initial piece was placed back in May 2020 in a technically complex operation. Since then, we've put in an additional piece on the south side and put in wing walls, done finishing work and grading. To finish off the culvert there'll be some mods come spring. Basically, just putting in a fence on the south side and a rail to stop stone from falling. Then some rip rap for erosion protection on the south side by the Bound Brook. Carbro is also working on completing the pump chamber. We have about two pours of concrete left for the roof. Then we have to put in the outlet pipe and then the head wall. After that, we are largely done with segment C1, at least in the current contract.

Segment C2 & H: Aiming to award this fiscal year, but there is a possibility that it may slip to FY23. That contract would consist of a base, consisting of the two closure gates across South Lincoln with all the supporting flood wall monoliths. Then, we would have options in the contract to finish segment C1. We've left a gap in the base flood wall, and we still have to come back and put in place the levee option, as well as a couple other things. That's going to be an option under C2 & H, as will the Segment H levee east of South Lincoln Avenue.

The remaining C1 work and the Segment H levee are hydraulically dependent. We're looking to execute that work in tandem. Then there will be remaining options west to South Lincoln.

Segment C3 and C4: We're working on our design of a flood wall and levee. Proceeding toward 95% design. Once we have 95% design, we'll be able to make our permit application to LURP which we need to issue a construction contract.

Segment B4 & C5: In design process.

Funding Status:

We've had a lot of challenges building this project over the years. There's completion of design, there's permit application, there's real estate acquisition over time, and last, but not least, there's the issue of funding. We've been receiving \$30 million a year federal and \$10 million non-Federal, with a 75/ 25 match. With that type of funding stream, our forecast was that we would finish the project in the late 2030s - say between 2035 and 2040.

But with the recent passing of DRSA - Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act - Green Brook was named to receive \$496 million, which is the current estimated amount we believe necessary to complete the project in the Lower Basin and Stony Brook. The supplemental Acts

that were just passed also provide \$3.2 million to initiate and conduct a general re-evaluation report (GRR) for the Upper Basin.

Now that the validation report is complete and we know that Segments M, O and S are problematic to implement, we're looking to begin that GRR effort and look at other solutions to provide flood risk management in the Upper Basin. It is good news.

The \$496 million should be enough to complete the project in the Lower Basin and Stony Brook and then you get \$3.2 million for the GRR for the Upper Basin. Hopefully we can identify something we could do there. It's excellent news. It expedites the project greatly and provides the potential to finish it possibly in less than 10 years.

We are still waiting on implementation guidance from our head headquarters and higher authorities within the ASA and OMB. One question that comes up all the time from the non-federal sponsor and from local stakeholders is how the cost sharing would be worked. With approximately half a billion dollars, 25% of that would be \$125 million. We still don't have a direction at this time as to whether our sponsor at NJ DEP would be required to pay that back or whether that \$500 million is just simply all federal and NJ DEP doesn't owe a dime. Hopefully, it will be all federal, it will make things a lot easier. As soon as we know, we'll certainly convey that to DEP and the Flood Commission.

You've all seen the bubble map and the construction sequencing, and that is based on the current funding stream. With \$500 million in the bank and keep in mind, we also carried into this fiscal year, approximately \$40 million. The regular yearly budget still calls for \$30 million fed. The potential is we have potentially up to \$580 million so we're going to be working out the details to complete the project.

With all that money, it wouldn't be acceptable to continue issuing relatively smaller construction contracts on the order of \$20 or \$30 million a year. Now we potentially have the ability to build out and to award much larger contracts, i.e., \$50 million, \$100 million, and potentially issuing contracts by system.

Maybe finish I, J, K as one contract. Then C, H, B, D, and E, F, G, and the non-structural measures of P and Q and then L in the Stony Brook. It will take a little bit of time as we get our strategy together. We'll have to do some hydraulic modeling to see how we want to sequence this out. That would also necessitate, potentially additional help to expedite the work. Perhaps potentially a dedicated Green Brook team, help from other districts, reaching out to Architect/Engineering firms, etc. There are still some questions remaining as we flesh out our approach.

This is excellent news. Whatever challenges we are facing now, all this funding is a potential way to address a lot of problems which this project faces and then hopefully implement it and get it done.

Mr. Ray Murray: Let me ask a question. Is the \$496 million grossed up? What I mean is that the government's estimate of your portion or is that the total estimate? Because that would seem like that would be a shortcut to figuring out whether the state had to come up with their 25%.

Mr. Peterson: The \$500 million is the estimated federal and non-federal amount to complete. When we talk about NJ DEP potentially having to pay its 25% share, that portion is already included in the \$500 million, but we're awaiting guidance. There is a real possibility, that it will

be all Federal and DEP may not owe anything retroactively but don't quote me yet. We're still waiting guidance on that point.

Mr. Murray: My thoughts are that it may have had to be appropriated that way simply because we don't have the State share in hand. Or it may be that we're not going to require the State to pay their share back. More to come on that. So don't go giving any money away over there DEP, keep your 25% in mind as we go forward, and we pray for the best.

QUESTIONS for ARMY CORPS of ENGINEERS

Mr. Harry Allen: Alek, what's going on with 207 Pond?

Mr. Peterson: 207 Pond is in the condemnation process, and we need that property to finish some of the Segment C1 work, as well as the Segment H levee under C2 and H. Right now, the package is at NAD. We have previous comments from NAD, including items they want us to address before that package would move on to Headquarters. From Headquarters, it moves on to Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army (DASA) and then hopefully to the Justice Department for a Federal judge to hear it. We still have a long path.

We received some minor comments, but the two most prominent sets of comments are environmental and real estate. Both sides are progressing. There were reports with NJDEP of potential contamination on the property. We've been coordinating through our Environmental Analysis Branch, with DEP through their site remediation and waste management program, as well as with an individual who's a licensed site remediation professional (LSRP). That is someone that the DEP licenses to go out and do inspections and basically make a recommendation to DEP of whether the report is viable or not. We actually have the report from the last open potential contamination item from the LSRP to NJDEP and the conclusions are that these items should be closed. We're coordinating with DEP to review everything and administratively close out the items.

The other item is real estate. As part of the Segment C1 base flood wall we had to relocate a Verizon fiber optic line that was under the base flood wall. We did so long ago, otherwise we wouldn't have been able to build the base flood wall. That has left behind an existing easement on the 207 Pond property where the line no longer is. Our division is requesting that we vacate the old existing easement and also provide a new easement to Verizon with the current location of the line and come up with a programmatic agreement with Verizon that we can use in the future. Other portions of that same line, lie under future construction segments. Our real estate office is working that. I don't have an exact timeframe to address all these comments, but once we're done with our conclusions, we're going to package everything up in an Environmental Conditions Report. That goes back to NAD and then hopefully they agree with our conclusions. Then this package could be advanced to headquarters, then to DASA and then DOJ.

Mr. Allen: That's not going to stop you from proceeding now, right?

Mr. Peterson: The 207 Pond condemnation does hold up a couple of particular elements of the project. Namely, finishing the remaining C1 options, such as, closing the base gap, building an additional 125-feet of flood wall, and then a levee and a generator building and fuel cell that are on that levee.

The remaining C1 features closing them and the Segment H levee under C2 and H are hydraulically dependent. There is a couple little areas where the condemnation process is holding up completion of construction. We don't anticipate that would be a holdup for future construction segments or moving forward with the \$100 million.

Mr. Allen: What's the name of the site where the LSRP has determined no further action. Do you have a name for that site?

Mr. Peterson: We call it 207 Pond Avenue.

Mr. Allen: Okay. I'll look it up. I'm interested.

Mr. Peterson: If you go down Clay Avenue off the main road through the Borough, when you reach the end of Clay Avenue, you get to the contractor fence. To the right you'll see the flood wall; to the left you'll see a large white warehouse. That's the 207 Pond building, and our plan calls for the line of protection to go through the back of that.

Speaker: Thank you. I'm going to look it up.

Mr. Murray: Ted had asked if we could have Bethany on while we're still doing the Corps portion. Ted, did you have any specific questions regarding what's going on in the Upper Basin or the timeline or anything that you wanted to ask of the Corps?

Mr. Ted Bassman: Well, I don't have anything right now. I was going on the idea this thing was going to go for another fiscal year or two waiting for funding and project management plans to be developed and all the bureaucracy. So, with the funding, this is a whole new game here.

Mr. Murray: Indeed, it is. It takes everybody that's put any effort into this, that got us to this point, to take credit for moving the project forward. I know that there's no one on this call that isn't going to be jumping up and down until it is all constructed. It's a big relief knowing that we don't have to travel down to DC quite as often. I'm sure we'll have some tweaks that we're going to need here and there. We are still going to have to keep very much in contact with our Congressional delegation and navigate this together.

Thanks to everybody who's ever served or ever come to any of the Commission meetings for getting us to this point.

NJ DEP . Tom Slowinski

Tom had an audio issue. Mr. Murray asked if Jack had anything to report, but he did not.

COMMENTS FROM THE COUNTIES

Middlesex County – Doug Greenfield

Nothing to report.

Somerset County – Melonie Marano

I am just so thrilled to have this project going to completion. This is such extraordinary news.

Thanks to everybody that's participating and good to see a bunch of old faces that I used to see all the time on the Commission when I was a Green Brook Township official. Good to see you again.

Somerset County – Valerie Bogart

I would like to mimic what Commissioner Marano has said. I'm very happy that we've got the funding to bring this project to completion at least Stony Brook and in the Lower Basin. Want to say thank you to everyone on the Commission that has worked so hard.

Somerset County – Joe Skupien

Everything has been said . Thanks!

Union County – Bernice Dieter

Not present.

GBFCC ENGINEER . Rich O'Connor

No report.

WINNING STRATEGIES . Mike Merola

Pleasure to spend some time with all of you this evening. I know I'm new to many of you, but I just want to reassure you that I've been involved in this project since 1999, when Hurricane Floyd hit. I was a Senate staffer and worked on the recovery on behalf of Senator Torricelli. I'm proud of our partnership and everything we've been able to support you in and the Congressional delegation over the years.

I really lucked out in terms of picking a meeting to cover for Rob, because there's nothing but good news tonight. You and the Congresswoman covered a lot of the details; no need to go over them again.

Two points I want to make and leave you with.

- 1) We're working to come up with a series of events, and other ways, to appropriately thank all of the members for their hard work and success. More on that soon.
- 2) As Alek referenced, there's \$30 million in this year's funding bill for the Army Corps. So, we're working to see if the \$500 million obviates the need for that. Until we know, our position is it should go to the project and can be reassigned later. We're pushing to get that over the finish line, as they wrap up the budget. Following Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman's lead on that in the run up to February 18 when the budget hopefully will be close to being done.

Happy to answer any questions though.

QUESTIONS for ARMY CORPS of ENGINEERS

Mr. Hector Vargas: I live in 134 Third St in Middlesex. When this Ida storm happened, there was supposedly a New Jersey Transit train that left one of the flood gates open. Was that the main cause of it or was that a part of the cause?

Mr. Murray: The train issue was on the western side of Bound Brook Borough. The root cause of that was the heavy flows off of the mountain, caused the Middle Brook to rise to a point that debris washed onto the tracks. Then the Middle Brook came back down, but by then the debris

was on the tracks. The real litmus test at that point was the closing of the gates would occur when the Raritan reached a certain elevation. The flooding has generally always been the case when the Raritan tides rise, would back up the water into the Middle Brook and cause it to breach the train tracks at that location.

There was a train on the tracks, not knowing that there was debris in the way and that train became disabled when the debris got under the train. They weren't able to get the train re-enabled in time to get the gate closed. They made the best of it and closed the side of the gate that they could completely close. The other side of the gate., they closed up against the train and tried to position bags to help with any of the overland flooding. The Western side of Bound Brook did experience flooding because they couldn't get the gate closed.

There's been a number of calls. A very large conference call with Mayor Fazen and his staff in Bound Brook, along with New Jersey Transit, the Army Corps, NJDEP, as well as Somerset County. We've talked extensively about how we got in that position, and what we could do to prevent that going forward.

One of the key things that was mentioned by New Jersey Transit is the possibility of installing cameras in and near that location so that they can see the rise of the Middle Brook much sooner. Then they can make a call to stop the trains earlier than would have otherwise been the case. They talked about placing cameras that would give them a true gauge of what's going on there that would be viewed by their operation center in Newark. That's just one of the things being considered. There's been suggestions about having maybe two different trigger points. One when the Middlebrook reaches a certain elevation and then a second one when the Raritan reaches a certain elevation, so we don't have what occurred happen again.

Mr. Vargas: That sounds like a great idea, and I would recommend anything and everything to avoid that again. At the same time, weren't NJ Transit told to stop their services hours and hours before this?

Mr. Murray: No, actually the train was stuck on the tracks for about two and a half hours, if my memory serves, before they would have been notified that the Raritan had reached the elevation where they would receive notification that they should stop running the trains. Specifically, because it's never happened before, for the Middlebrook reached an elevation where the debris washed onto the track on its own, rather than having the water back up in the Middle Brook from the Raritan.

It was an anomaly. Speaking from my perch here in Green Brook Township, it was the extreme amount of water that was coming down the hill in a short period of time that caused that initial flooding. We saw it here in Green Brook where we had streets that lead to the Green Brook that were rivers long before the Green Brook itself was backing up into the neighborhoods.

It was the amount of water that was hitting the mountain and coming down. If you've been down Route 22 through Bridgewater, you'll see that there's extensive damage, on Route 22 at the Middle Brook. There's more damage to some of the other infrastructure in Bridgewater, notably, some sewer issues around Vosseller Avenue.

In Green Brook Township, we literally had a landslide coming out of Washington Rock State Park. We are now working with the State Park folks to try to get a permanent solution and keep that from happening again. So, again, it was a lot of water coming down the mountain and that got the debris onto the tracks in Bound Brook long before they would have reached an

elevation, based on the other standard of what the elevation of the Raritan is, to contact them and say stop running the trains.

Mr. Vargas: Okay. So, this camera system would help prevent that? Or is this just something else not based on that and the problem is just debris.

Mr. Murray: No, that would definitely help prevent that. Just knowing that the train couldn't continue any further, if they had known that they certainly would've stopped running the train earlier than they did.

Speaker: It was written in the newspaper that New Jersey Transit did have ample time. Two days before we were told how bad that the storm was going to be and they still have this train running. Excuse me for being upset here, but I've been out of my house since September 2nd. I'm living with my daughter and I'm still paying a mortgage & taxes on a home that I can't even live in at this point. Every time there's a storm, there's always something that's happening and that's why we all got flooded. There are 34 homes that have been flooded in this town. Taxes keep rising. Now you're telling us that the flood walls won't be completed until 2035 to 2040. There are residents that have been living in Middlesex for over 50 years. They've told me that they've gone to numerous town hall meetings, talking about the flooding issues, and nothing was ever, ever done. People do not understand how hard it is to not be in your own home.

Mr. Murray: I'd be happy to address that. To say that all this started or became a problem because of one person is not a traditional approach.

Speaker: I am not saying it is from one person. I'm just saying that people have to take responsibility and be accountable. NJ Transit was notified that there was a big storm coming and they still allow the trains to ride. It was all over the news for weeks about the storm coming.

Mr. Murray: That's true. I'll give you my take here from Green Brook Township. The Office of Emergency Management called the day before the storm. We were looking at a storm that was estimated to be four or five inches of rain. Then what we actually received was eight to nine inches of rain. So they could have stopped the trains running days ahead, but based on the information that they had, it would have been safe to run the trains down the track.

I'm certainly not defending them for what they did or didn't do. I'm just telling you the reason why the train got stuck. That's what we're left with.

Speaker: What I want to also say is that now because of all the damage that myself and 30-something other people have endured from this tragedy, this hurricane, what happens to our flood insurance policy? Should we be held accountable for that and have to have to pay the higher premiums? Half the people won't be able to live here if they jack up our insurance premiums. And through no fault of our own, we are out of our home and we are stuck with the worry of our insurance company jacking up our premiums through the roof.

Mr. Murray: Any flooding that happened anywhere other than the west side of Bound Brook had nothing to do with New Jersey Transit train running and that includes all the flooding that was experienced here in Green Brook Township, Middlesex Borough, Dunellen, where they had foundation walls blowout, and elsewhere. On Route 22 in North Plainfield, the force of the water coming down the mountain, literally moved two Jersey barriers about a foot from where they stood originally bolted into the ground.

The flooding that happened on the Western side of Bound Brook was because of what happened with the train. Flooding that occurred anywhere else had nothing to do with it. As much as we would love to see the whole project, even notwithstanding the money portion, done tomorrow, there is the reality that things need to be done in a proper sequence. They can't just build the entire project at once. 1) It's not manageable. 2) They must sequence portions of the project so that when they start putting a flood wall in one location, they don't create flooding in another location.

It is a matter of funding, and it is a matter of timing. We're grateful that the funding seems to be all in front of us right now, but it's still going to take time for them to get through. They have to develop plans. They have to make sure that the plans are going to work. They have to take those plans and look at the impacts of those plans as it relates to the other portions of the project, and also portions that aren't even in the project area, to make sure it is all being done in the right sequence, so that they don't create problems elsewhere. It's a long time coming, but knowing we are that much closer to the finish line is a great thing.

As a comparison, let's look a little further upstream to Manville. Manville has no project. We have a project here, that is going to provide this flood protection, and for that we're very grateful. There's no project even started in the Borough in Manville. Hundreds of homes that flooded and experienced damage time and time again there, and they are nowhere near a finish line in Manville. We would love for this thing to happen overnight, especially now that the money's there, but it's still going to take a number of years as Alek pointed out. There are so many little steps that must occur in the design. Acquisition of land, whether it be just a temporary easement to go survey on a property or to acquire a portion of the property or entire properties to actually construct the project.

The biggest impediments that we've had in recent years have been the funding portion and then the land acquisition portion. And now in theory we are left with just the land acquisition portion. They've got to ramp up the design. Whether it is all in house or different offices of the Army Corps chipping in or outside contractors to do the design to get the project defined.

Once they know exactly where the flood walls and levees are going to go, they must acquire any real estate license that they need to get onto those properties to design and to build. Then as they keep moving upstream, in the best way that they can, so that they don't affect other properties as they're building it. We can get all the way to the Upper Basin up to Berkeley Heights and out to South Plainfield and all the way to Bound Brook and get this entire triangle complete. It is definitely not going to happen overnight, but having the funding there is going to bring us one step closer to having it complete.

Mr. Vargas: Thank you for all the information you have given. It is very informative, and we've learned some things with you.

Mr. Murray: I can't even remember all the names of the storms that we've dealt with over the years. I was about six years old when a storm hit, and I recall wading in the Green Brook at Mountain Parkway and Greenbook Road here in Green Brook and my brother was swimming to the other end of Greenbrook Road.

These things take a lot longer than we want them to. It took from 1973 to 1986, to get Congress to say okay. It took until 1997 to actually have a plan in hand and until 1999 to get the shovel in the ground. They've been working at the pace that they can since then.

We had a storm that was quite devastating. And, as fate would have it, the next meeting after that, was in Scotch Plains. You know, we would love to protect everybody overnight with the project. There was someone at that meeting from Middlesex Borough and said, "I heard that, because Bound Brook was built, that's why we flooded."

Joe Skupien from Somerset County pointed out then, the elevation of the stream in Middlesex Borough near this person's home was at least 14 feet higher than the top of the flood wall in Bound Brook. It wasn't caused by the wall in Bound Brook. There are so many factors, the timing, the tides, where the water's coming from and how it's getting to the stream are all factors that affect the overall picture.

I understand your frustration of being out of your house. Here in Green Brook Township, we purchased five houses over the past six years in flood prone areas. We have another two that we're planning on closing on. And another two that are in the pipeline, using FEMA money to get people out of harm's way. I've been in homes of people that are in your position where they, just frustrated by the process. They just can't do it anymore. To have a very staunch, very private person crying in his kitchen, just saying, I can't do this anymore, buy me out or I need to know that the finish line is here now. What can you do to protect me?

It is a slow process but thank God we're moving forward. We have a plan, and now have funding. As the Corps said, we're going to do everything we can to make the project segments as big as possible so that we can get the project done that much quicker. The funding will definitely expedite the process, but it's still going to take a number of years before we get to that point.

Mr. Crosby: We are a lot better off than we were in 1973.

Mr. Vargas: The sad thing is, it's taken decades and decades and decades and decades, people are saying they're sick and tired of it. Leaving the towns. People are getting frustrated, depressed, annoyed, disgusted. God forbid, we lost someone in this flood, I don't know if we lost anyone from the seventies.

Mr. Murray: During Hurricane Floyd, there were two people that died in Bound Brook because of the flooding and six people died in 1973. We remember those folks by name, at our August Memorial. It is a slow process, but we are moving forward. My heart goes out to people. I worked with a group of nonprofits here in town, and we were cutting sheet rock out of homes and removing insulation after the storm. We were helping people move their white goods out to the curb and things of that nature. We all want this project done as soon as possible.

Speaker: Exactly, but it's going to take another 10 to 20 years for this project to finish and in the meantime, people get flooded out of their homes. Their basement will be flooded like mine was. The Township keeps raising the property taxes. My house is worth nothing and they keep raising my taxes. My insurance premiums are going through the roof. Why would I stay there? You know, there's people that are just done with it.

And with FEMA . it is just so much red tape you have to go through. Mentally and physically, what you have to go through. And then FEMA, wants all this paperwork, all this information, even though they've gone to your property, taken pictures, asked you questions. I think they should talk to the insurance companies, and get the information from your insurance companies, as to what they are going to pay, and what they are not going to pay. There's a lot of red tape.

Mr. Murray: For what it is worth, the program I was talking about is not this recovery that you folks have been dealing with. There are programs through FEMA, you can check with Middlesex Borough, where there's funding available to buy out flood-prone properties. That is what I was specifically talking about. We've done a number of those here in Green Brook.

We closed on one in January of this year, and we are closing on a second one before February is over. Some of these people were in the same situation that you are. They flooded multiple times. The first house that we bought out, the guy standing there crying in his kitchen said to me, I can't do this. I've lived in this house for 10 years and this is the third time I've flooded.

There are mitigation programs that the Borough can investigate. I know that Somerset County, at the County level, has made an effort to buy out some of these flood-prone properties using FEMA funding. There are opportunities out there. I would encourage you to speak with the Borough to see if there's a way of moving that forward.

Again, it's not a fast process. We had properties in the works since 2018 and we just did demo. We got word that we were awarded with the right to move forward in middle of the pandemic and by the time the folks found other housing and could move out, we closed on it last month. It is not a super quick process, but it may finish and get you out of harm's way a little bit quicker.

Speaker: We applied for Blue Acres when Irene hit and they said we don't qualify.

Mr. Murray: It is not a Blue Acres Program. It is a flood mitigation program through FEMA. The Blue Acres program is a State program that helps people when homes are substantially damaged. I think that threshold might be better than 50% of the value of the home. If you tried before, you might try again. These mitigation programs are acquisition programs that run through FEMA. There is a need. Depending on the program it could be covered 100% by FEMA, depending on your losses or maybe a 75% rate, but there are mitigation programs out there. I'd encourage you to reach out to the Borough and see if there is any way to get that program started in Middlesex Borough for your benefit.

Mr. Vargas: Thank you. We will definitely inquire about that. Thank you. You all have been very informative. I thank all of you for all trying and working hard for us.

Mr. Murray: My information is on the Commission website GBFCC.org. If you have questions about the process, feel free to call me or email me. I'd be happy to tell you a little bit more about the program. I'd be happy to reach out to Mayor Madden with you and talk about the program with him and see if we can do more to get you out of harm's way.

Tom Slowinski, NJDEP: Try again with the Blue Acres. You are now a repetitive loss. Maybe the first time you applied, they looked the other way, but because you got hit again - try with Blue Acres. They have money available for buyouts.

Off that point, I just want to say, I know the Colonel met with our Commissioner the other day. The big question on the funding and sharing is still up in the air. I know you remember in 2011, when things slowed down, we had that stimulus funding and we got going with Segment B1 at Sebring's Mills. Just hope for the best.

Your Jerseyites in Little Falls, Cedar Grove and Woodland Park, they came across with \$146 million for the Peckman Project. That's a good thing for them, but we got more money than that.

Just be reminded that Bound Brook took 16 years to complete, and we still had the issue with that train. Unfortunately, the air lines severed, and the fail-safe system is that the trains stop when the air line breaks.

Our office in conjunction with FEMA and the National Flood Insurance Program just issued out 565 new flood plain ordinances for each town. These towns have to take this seriously. All these adjoining towns, that have tributaries to these creeks, have ordinances that say you can't store materials in a flood plain. You can't do that, and they need to enforce that. That was one of the issues with Middle Brook. Granted Mother Nature ripped a lot of trees out, but a lot of that stuff that came down, was from people's backyard supplies. This has to be taken seriously. To date we have less than two dozen approved ordinances back out of 565. Keep that in mind, all the easements along the floodplain project, need to be maintained. You can't encroach. That's why we have these easements. They must be protected properties.

That's all I want to add on the State's behalf. I'm glad we got Bonnie on tonight. She shopped for that Bill, and we got it. It's going to take time. Real estate permits our biggest problem, but just keep the faith and it'll get done.

And to the neighbor that lost, please try again with Blue Acres. Try because you got hit again. They may take a more serious look at it. Let's hope they do.

Mr. Vargas & Speaker: Thank you. We will.

Mr. Murray provided his email address and offers his assistance. Also, reiterates that he works in Green Brook Township, and they can just call the main number to get to him.

Mr. Bassman: Let us not forget when the stimulus came out, it was Gov. Corzine's first year as the governor, and he was starting to run into money problems. He was choking at the idea of coming up with the matching funds for the stimulus at the time. It took a phone call from Senator Lautenberg to him to say, we're not going to turn back the money. This matching funds is a serious issue with the State level.

Mr. Murray: Ted, I would say let's wait and see what guidance we get from Headquarters. If it turns out that we have to come up with the match, and we have to do it timely without an IOU system, then we'll fight that next fight as we've done every other fight.

It might mean going to NJDEP and asking them to borrow money, so that they can make the match, then that's what we'll have to do. Because like you said, we're not turning back good money. We're getting this project done.

Mr. Peterson: I just wanted to piggyback off what you were saying earlier. I believe you were referring to the 2007 storm event. We first started receiving construction dollars in 1999 and began building the Bound Brook U-R-T system and it was proceeding at a certain pace. Then we had that event in 2007 and we got the stimulus funds. I believe it was ARRA . American Recover & Reinvestment Act. That enabled the project in Bound Brook to be complete (the U-R-T system). When the train got stuck in the gap, while it did cause significant flooding, the Corps project in place in Bound Brook prevented the Borough from being devastated.

Back in Floyd, there was 13 or 14 feet of water on Bound Brook Main Street. During Ida, when we went out the day after to do a post storm inspection, we had waters right up to the top of the R2 levee. If we didn't have U-R-T in place, Bound Brook would have been completely

devastated like in Floyd when New Jersey Transit trains stop running to the town for eight months. That stimulus package enabled us to complete one system, U-R-T. Now we're in an analogous situation in 2022 and DRSA . Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act - has provided half a billion dollars, not just to complete one system protecting one borough, but the whole Lower Basin and Stony Brook portions, as well as get started with a GRR for the Upper Basin. Whatever timeline we had out to 2035 or so to finish the project, this now gives us a fortunate opportunity to complete pretty much the whole project.

Mr. Murray: I drove Bound Brook after the storm with Mayor Fazen and he was overjoyed. It was unfortunate that there was the train issue and on the Eastern side they had a sewage backup issue. Realizing that the elevation of the Raritan was the same as it was during Floyd, that whole downtown area would have been completely under water to the same height as it was before. Fortunate the project was complete. Unfortunate that there was the train issue.

There are things in design in Middlesex Borough. We are building portions behind Jaeger Lumber. We're doing work on the Cap Lane area. We are moving those portions of the project forward for Segments C and H, near where Lincoln Boulevard meets South Lincoln. We are keeping this moving this forward. We are in design for the area by Middlesex High School. Working almost exclusively right now in Middlesex Borough because that's the facts of the hydrology. We've got to build certain segments before we build other ones.

When we get to the back of the Middlesex High School, there's a need to stop at that point, and work further upstream so that we don't back up water in Dunellen and Green Brook. The project will finish out to the Green Brook near Middlesex High School and then focus will shift up upstream to Green Brook, Dunellen and the edge of Plainfield. Even when the money's there, they still have to do everything in the right order. There's a lot of work going in Middlesex and a lot more work will be going on. We are grateful for the money and we're just going to keep doing what we've been doing for 50 years.

Mr. Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Peterson, for that information about the before and after in Bound Brook. It is a big difference, I agree with you on that, because 13 feet did not happen. That's very important.

Mr. Peterson: During Ida, I believe, Mayor Madden indicated that water was up almost to the curb edge, but it could have been 13 or 14 feet without the project. It is cold comfort to people who have flooded, especially repetitively, but this influx of cash to complete the Lower Basin and Stony Brook and look at the Upper Basin offers great potential hope. This project could be pre-investigated, designed, and construction contracts issued in a portion of the time than if we were on the same piecemeal funding path of \$30 million federal and \$10 million non-federal.

Mr. Vargas: If we got all that funding a lot sooner, we would have been well past all this conversation, that we all understand. Now that we've got this money, we must speed it up so it helps everyone that gets flooded. It's not just my home, but everybody else's too. We're talking about thousands of residents and they're all my neighbors. They could be from another town, but they are my neighbors and my friends.

Mr. Murray: We couldn't agree with you more. And that's the fight we've been fighting since 1973. We just have to keep doing the good work of pushing the project forward. If there's a State match that needs to be had, we have to make sure that gets put in place. Then just keep

moving the project forward until we are done, up to Watchung and Berkeley Heights, and out to Scotch Plains and Plainfield.

Any severe storm can cause damage, we don't even need a global storm like the one that we had when Ida hit. We had a flash storm event a couple of years ago where basically a cloud hit Watchung at the quarry and the amount of rain that came down was tantamount. We talk about a 100-year storm, we suspect that one could have been somewhere in the neighborhood of a 4,000-year storm. Just an incredible amount of water in a short period of time and Park Avenue in Scotch Plains was a stream. It was coming down the mountain, up over the curb, and going through Scotch Plains.

We are going to keep doing what we can to move it forward as quick as we can and just not stop until it's all done.

Mr. Vargas: Thank you. And keep fighting. We want you to fight, put your boxing gloves on and fight. If we need a cage match, we'll do that too. Whatever is needed, let's get it going. I'm all for that.

Mr. Bassman: In that storm you just mentioned, I don't think the Green Brook even went into a flood stage.

Mr. Murray: It did not.

Mr. Bassman: It was all downstream on the Route 22 side of the Watchung.

Mr. Murray: Those freak events will happen. We have got to make sure that we can get the things that we can control. We have to do our best to keep moving forward so that we can get the project done.

We are not the only ones that flood. There's still going to be people in and around the area that are going to flood. This project is designed to help the people that are affected by the flooding along the Green Brook. We'd love to help everybody and have everybody safe; we can only do what is related to this 65-square mile basin. That is the Green Brook sub-basin.

Speaker: I would just wish the people up the hill would stop building their million dollar homes up there.

Mr. Murray: There's a part of all of us that wants everybody to stop building and let the ground suck the water up a little bit easier and have trees instead of pavement. We'll do what we can.

I live in the valley too. I'm not quite as close to the stream, but I do live in the valley too. Even during Ida, the street that connects to the street that I live on, there was red shale that washed down from the other side of route 22 so, I know all too well that it does roll downhill.

Mr. Bassman: There has been an awful lot of the development in low areas.

Mr. Murray: To Tom's point, debris that's in the flood plain that washes into the streams and onto the tracks is a problem. I got about a dozen logs that I can see from my window, that floated from somewhere upstream and deposited themselves probably 30 feet away from the water's edge and the pond in my park back here. They are still there because we just haven't gotten to them.

Thank you everyone for joining and again for those residents, feel free to reach out.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 8:50 PM

Upcoming GBFCC meeting dates:

Wednesday, April 6, 2022, 7:30 pm - Zoom

Wednesday, June 1, 2022, 7:30 pm - Zoom

Saturday, August 6, 2022, 9:30 am - American Legion Pavilion, 707 Legion Pl, Middlesex

Wednesday, October 5, 2022, 7:30 pm - Zoom

Wednesday, December 7, 2022, 7:30 pm . Zoom

Wednesday, February 1, 2023, 7:30 pm - Zoom