

**GREEN BROOK FLOOD CONTROL COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

LOCATION: Virtual Meeting

DATE: February 1, 2023

MEETING CONVENEED: 7:30 PM

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 . GBFCC Chairman - GB
Paul Woska . GBFCC Vice-Chair-Middlesex
William Crosby . GBFCC Treasurer- NP
Nate Wales . USACE NY District
Tom Slowinski . NJDEP
Valerie Bogart . Somerset County
Ricardo Mattias . Union County
Rich O'Connor . Engineer, GBFCC
Trina Rios . Dunellen
Mark Kranz . Middlesex Borough

Mark Hardenburg . Piscataway
John Ferguson . South Plainfield
Alice Temple . South Plainfield
Christine Ead . Watchung
Jeanne Kingsley . Berkeley Heights
Jeff Varnerin . Berkeley Heights
Maribel Carvalho . Middlesex
Nancy Piwowar . Plainfield
Linda

MINUTES

The December minutes were approved. A copy of approved minutes is available on the GBFCC website.

CORRESPONDENCE

Very little external correspondence.

Received a phone call from a Bridgewater resident inquiring about non-structural floodproofing. Forwarded the contact information to the Corps for follow-up.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Mr. Crosby noted that nearly half of all participants have paid their 2023 dues. Expenses for the period include the normal three bills to be paid . Grotto Engineering, Tina Totten for sending out notices, and our Government Relations consultant Winning Strategies, plus the annual dues for the New Jersey Alliance of Action. Bills were reviewed & motion to pay. Motion carried.

ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS . Nate Wales, Project Planner

Alec Peterson could not be at the meeting. Nate Wales, the Project Manager for the Upper Basin, will give report for the Lower Basin too.

Lower Basin: Continuing to work on real estate acquisitions for Lower Basin. It is a slow process. Ready to award next construction contract in Middlesex Borough for Segment C this month. Bids have been submitted and in the review process now. Will confirm at next meeting whether it is the C1 or the C2&H contract.

Resident of Capp Lane, Middlesex inquired about timetable for protection in her area and discussion continued about that.

Mr. Murray: I received an updated bubble map today from the Corps and that has the Segment C1 options, as well as the Segment C2 & H work, listed for award in fiscal year 2023. When construction will begin remains to be seen, but things are moving in a positive direction.

Earlier in 2022 Congresswoman Bonnie Watson-Coleman was instrumental in getting \$496 million allocated to this project in a disaster relief bill. At the end of December, Congress made it clear to USACE that this will be a fully funded project and there would not be a requirement for the State to contribute the match of \$124 million. Upper Basin study money of \$3.2 million was also included in this disaster relief bill to study the Upper Basin. Fantastic news for the project to keep things moving forward.

Upper Basin: Kicked off the general reevaluation study. Next milestone in the study process is to present to USCAE regional planning management our recommendations of the focused array of alternatives that we are going to look at over the next several months. The meeting tomorrow afternoon is with USACE and NJDEP. Other opportunity to provide input would be during public meetings to be scheduled over the next few months. Also, through the National Environmental Policy Act process under which we write out an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. The draft report is scheduled to be released February 2024. That will go out to the public and will take public comment if that is what NJDEP wants us to do. That will be the opportunity for the Flood Control Commission, the local municipalities, and the public to provide input.

The five alternatives are:

#1 - Series of floodwalls and levees along the Green Brook. (mostly floodwalls due to space constraints) Our analysis is that this will not be economically justified, and we suggest this is screened out. The cost to build is greater than the benefit accrued.

#2 . Construction of a dry detention basin at New Providence Road. This would include relocating the road and building a dam that would hold back water, allowing it to drain in a more regulated fashion. This would provide flood risk management to most of the Upper Basin, certainly the City of Plainfield and Borough of North Plainfield. It is the Corps analysis so far that this alternative is not likely going to be economically justified and the Corps recommends that detention basins not be looked at over the next couple months.

#3 - Surface and Tunnel Diversion. Surface diversions would run into a host of environmental and cost problems. Tunnels are very unlikely to be economically justified at this point. We recommend this option be screened out too.

#4 - Non-Structural Plan. Elevating homes, ring walls, buyouts. We recommend this option stay and continue to be studied to evaluate if there are ways to do these things and provide flood risk management to reduce damages to homes and businesses during a flood event. We will pursue this.

#5 . A Combination Plan. A combo of small sections of floodwalls, channel improvements, along with some non-structural measures to see if the combination might provide the best protection for the cost.

Generally, we all agree that alternative #1 & #3, will not move forward for further study and that alternatives #4 and #5 will move forward for additional study. Alternative #2 is the question mark at this point. Our team recommends not including #2 in the study.

Mr. Murray: Speaking on behalf of the Commission, I believe it would be a good idea to leave the detention basin in for consideration. If for no other reason, perhaps it could be used in a combination similar to alternative number 5. The basin would not be at the original site in Berkley Heights on the Connell Corporate Park site in Watching reservation, but perhaps a smaller basin at a different location to provide some relief in combination with some of the other features.

For the benefit of people that may not have been on many of these calls, when Nate talks about non-structural solutions, he is referring to individual, property-by-property improvements, as opposed to a system-wide improvement such as a levee, or a floodwall with a pump station. It is fixing structures on a one-by-one basis. It might be a buy-out for one structure, and elevating a different house, or moving all the utilities out of the basement to a higher level of a structure.

At the last project team meeting, I expressed my feeling that I would rather not exclude a detention basin somewhere in the Watchung Mountains. Any amount of water that can be retained up there, will be that much less water to deal with running down Park Avenue in Scotch Plains and winding up on Second Street in Plainfield. Let's not rule it out yet. NJDEP did speak on the subject as well and had a similar take.

We realize that examining some type of retention in the Upper Basin will probably exceed the \$3.2 million budget at this point but let's not be penny-wise here. Let's keep as many viable options on the table at this point. If the global project is costing over \$1.4 billion dollars, let's not eliminate this idea to save a million dollars, if it can possibly provide a good benefit.

Mr. Tom Slowinski, NJDEP: I totally agree. I asked an official from Wildlife Services at a previous meeting if putting a dam in a stream would be allowed as some type of trade off. He said only if it is related to the project itself. I was thinking in Plainfield, a lot of the stream is tubed. Even if it was a partial daylight project in Plainfield, those people get flooded anyway. It is the surface flow that doesn't make it into the tube from the park that comes down their way anyway. If you look at the flood maps they are in a zone. That's why it is good to leave that on the table. I don't want to go any further with that. Tomorrow's milestone meeting, as Nate mentioned, is between the Corps and NJ DEP. I felt it important to invite the majority stakeholders, but please just listen it. There will be time to comment later on down the road.

Mr. Wales: In terms of looking at detention basins, as you mentioned maybe a smaller scale one, we do have a couple constraints on how small we can go. My understanding is there are some DEP regulations; as well as some different mindsets on the appropriate size for a safe detention basin. Again, all to be considered depending on the results of the meeting. My team is ready to examine the alternatives as directed, expediently and use all our resources as directed. If the directive is to study detention basins, it may impact the schedule I gave previously and may take additional time.

Mr. Slowinski: It is not only going to require additional time, but it will also require additional funding from the State.

Mr. Wales: That is a possibility, and we need to be transparent on that topic.

NJ DEP . Tom Slowinski

We have the Fresh Water Wetlands and the Flood Hazard Area permits for C2 & H. That is a good sign. Also, the Freehold Soil Conservation District looked over the Soil Erosion Plan and that was approved. Another good sign.

Last I heard from Carbro is that all the disconnects were done at 275 Lincoln, waiting on one additional permit from Middlesex Borough, so it can be demolished.

Everyone complains about time. Just want to remind people that we started Segment B1 during the Obama Administration near Sebrings Mills and B2 continued after that into 2013. Started on Capp Lane in 2015, we are seven years into that C2 project. Just want to remind everyone that Bound Brook took 16 years to complete. No doubt, there will be another Ida, or Irene or Floyd. I hope not, but we know it will happen. Until this project is complete, there is risk involved. It is not getting any safer right now. Some people on Capp Lane reported that the velocity was less during Ida. So the wall, even though not finished, did provide some assistance. Please have patience. It is going to get done.

COMMENTS FROM THE COUNTIES

Somerset County – Valerie Bogart . Just looking forward to the GRR meeting tomorrow.

Middlesex County – No representative present.

Union County – Ricardo Matias . thanked the Commission for inclusion in the meetings over the past month and noted Union County's commitment to being an active partner in the project.

Mark Kranz, Middlesex resident, expressed frustration over portions near his home not getting built yet. He says he experienced the worst flooding his house has seen in this last flood.

Mr. Murray addressed his concerns and explained that portions need to be delayed as to not induce flooding in other areas. Also explained that with all the additional funding the timetable has been expediated quite a bit. Mr. Murray reassured that all the plans are in place, and we are in a very good position, even though it may seem to be moving slow.

GBFCC ENGINEER . Rich O'Connor

Nothing to report.

WINNING STRATEGIES . Rob Zucker

Rob was unable to attend. Mr. Murray gave update.

A lot of work went into working with the Congressional delegation. Both Senator Booker's office and Senator Menendez's office, along with the delegations on the House side, to get that affirmative statement saying we are not going to let you hold the State of NJ hostage for the cost sharing. We just saved NJDEP \$1.24 million. Let's see what happens tomorrow at the meeting.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS / COMMENTS

Christine Ead asked a question via chat about stream maintenance.

Mr. Murray: Maintenance of the stream, for privately owned land, is up to property owner. Most don't have the wherewithal to deal with it. Talking about snags and debris buildup, I can tell you what we do here in Green Brook Township. We try to work with our partners at the County and with our partners in Dunellen Borough. If a tree comes down across the stream on Dunellen side, and we see it, we let them know. They get in touch with Mosquito Control for Middlesex County to help them remove the tree. Normal course of action is that as a tree goes down, we send our guys out to grab it from the banks, or if we have to put a boat in the water, they go out and cut it up and get it to the side of the stream. Unfortunately, it can become the problem of the municipality to deal with it. Talk with your Municipal Engineer to see if there is any way the Borough can help out the property owners.

Ms. Ead: 99% is on private property so you would need individual paperwork to allow access to the property and that doesn't seem to work. Watchung is unique in that we are two mountainous areas coming together in a valley. Most of the stream is very difficult to get to. I was hoping there was some sort of stream maintenance effort in place or some opportunity for funding for that.

Mr. Murray: It is getting to the stream that is usually the problem. Green Brook has several dead end streets that end near the Green Brook and only one time that a resident did not allow access.

Mr. Murray asked for a resolution to add Mr. Woska to the bank signature cards. Motion carried.

Mr. Murray asked for feedback as to whether to continue hosting these meetings going forward on Zoom or go back to in person meetings. Mr. Murray asked to please think about it and to email your feedback to him and we will go with the consensus.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 8:25 pm

Upcoming GBFCC meeting dates:

Wednesday, April 5, 2023, 7:30 pm

Wednesday, June 7, 2023, 7:30 pm