

**GREEN BROOK FLOOD CONTROL COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

LOCATION: Virtual Meeting

DATE: April 3, 2024

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
Bill Picard . GBFCC Treasurer-Scotch Plains
Edward Wrocenski . USACE NY District
Rich O'Connor . Engineer, GBFCC
Rob Zucker . Winning Strategies
Anthony Panzarino . Middlesex County
Melonie Marano . Somerset County
Crisol-Iris Lantz . Dunellen

Alex Miller . Dunellen
Mark Kranz . Middlesex
Oren Dabney . Plainfield
John Ferguson . South Plainfield

Jim Mesaros . Green Brook
Margaret Illis . Berkeley Heights
Robert Liguori . Private Contractor

MINUTES

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

TREASURER'S REPORT

Chairman Murray noted that the treasurer's report is available on the Commission's website and reported that the usual three bills have been presented for payment. A motion was made approving that the bills be paid.

CORRESPONDENCE

The Commission received a copy of a letter from NJDEP to Middlesex residents adjacent to the flood walls in Segment B-1. As part of the project, it was agreed to have a turnaround area so the construction vehicles would not back out into the roadway. The residents have been given notice that parking in this turnaround area needs to stop.

There have been several internal emails with the Army Corps and Congressional delegates. The first matter was about the project funding agreement. It will be 100% funded by the Federal government, but since the agreement wasn't signed, there has been a slowdown in work over the past two months. Trying to clear that matter up so the segments move along efficiently. Next matter was regarding the condemnation package for 207 Pond. Just trying to keep that progressing as it moves through the channels.

ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS . Edward Wrocenski, Project Manager

Mr. Wrocenski reported on the ongoing construction progress. Construction is on-going on Segment C2 & H in Middlesex Borough near South Lincoln Ave. Contractor continues to put in monoliths and build them. For the last few weeks, have dug a trench through South Lincoln

Avenue getting ready for the flood gate. The flood gate is being fabricated and expected to be delivered at the end of May. Planning to install it in June. Projected completion for the base contract for the floodwall and gate is July/early August.

Waiting for that cost agreement to finalize. USACE Office of Counsel is reviewing and hoping it gets released, so we can start circulating it to our non-federal partner, The State of New Jersey, and execute the agreement. It is good news that this is moving forward. Estimating it will take a couple more months which will marry up with the time frame for completing the current construction and then be able to tap into that federal money.

We have some levee work with the options for C2 & H that could be awarded right away to continue that line of protection. Also have environmental work that we can immediately award. And of course, the team will restart design work for all future segments.

In response to an upcoming demolition in Middlesex Borough, Mr. Murray will reach out to the Borough to make the Fire Department aware of a possible training exercise prior to demolition.

QUESTIONS of the Army Corps:

Mr. Murray noted that he saw a crew out this past week doing archaeological work along the Green Brook, which may be part of the study for Segment I-J-K.

Mr. Wrocenski: It could be for that Segment, or it could be for the Upper Basin study. We are close to finding our preferred alternative. It looks like it will probably be a non-structural solution, but that study is scheduled to go on through the Fall of 2025; we are about halfway through that study.

Mr. Murray: Speaking from my perspective on the Upper Basin planning study, a non-structural solution will be extremely challenging. If we are talking about only a non-structural solution for flood proofing about 500 structures in the City of Plainfield, it is going to be very difficult, and we are disappointed it is leaning in that direction. It seemed like there was some positive discussions about work near the quarry on Diamond Hill Road, and that solution seemed that it could benefit both the property owner and the Project and eliminate the need for significant non-structural work downstream. We will pick up discussion after the full report released, but we will not be happy if it is only non-structural improvements on 500 structures in City of Plainfield.

Ms. Margaret Illis: I live at the corner of Diamond Hill Road and Valley Road. If I read the diagrams correctly, the structural proposal is a rerouting of New Providence Road and the flooding at the base of Diamond Hill Road which is a major thoroughfare. It is hard to imagine how that structural improvement can be made without flooding these major arteries that people use to get from Scotch Plains to Overlook Hospital, just for one example.

Mr. Murray: One of the concepts being studied is possibly relocating the road to the west so that a dam could be placed to hold back the water.

Ms. Illis: I have looked at the plans, but if you look at the potential flooding as a result of that proposed change, the area to be flooded is the intersection of Diamond Hill & Valley. Even if you move New Providence Road to the west, according to the plans I saw, it is still flooding the southern section at Diamond Hill and Valley Road. I would love for someone to explain to us how that is supposed to work. It is a very busy intersection and a major thoroughfare.

Mr. Murray: Route 22 is a major thoroughfare and when it is flooded it has the same effect, paralyzing the area. The idea would be a combination of remedies, and maybe the basin doesn't accommodate quite as much water, but it eliminates the need for so many non-structural remedies downstream, that's why it would be disappointing if that was completely off the table at this point. We need to look at all the solutions. Some solutions will not be economically feasible, and I understand that, but we will not get the participation we need to make an impact if we have 500 individual property owners needing to expend hundreds of thousands of dollars and then wait to get reimbursed by the Federal Government - that is not going to work. There is no clear process for that in place which will further delay any flood protection for the people in Plainfield. More than a decade after the first flood-proofing study began in Green Brook, they still don't have a path forward for how the individual non-structural improvements would work.

Mr. Oren Dabney: The funding for the 500 structures in Plainfield is expected to come from the homeowners and that is just bothersome.

Mr. Murray: That is my concern. People will not have the wherewithal to come up with the money upfront and wait to be reimbursed from the Federal Government. If the solution becomes individual flood-proofing and is undertaken by the Army Corps that might be more doable. The property owner would be inconvenienced by flood-proofing changes made to their structures, but they would get the safety and security of being out of harm's way. Many will not have the finances to undertake the work first and get reimbursed.

Mr. Robert Liguori: I am curious about Segments C3 & C4. Are they to be brought forward in 2024 or 2025?

Mr. Wrocenski: Segments C3 & C4 are set for Summer of 2025. We could not get to it this year because of the delay in getting these funds, but the scope has not changed.

Mr. Jim Mesaros: What are the next steps for the USACE? Do we send them back to the drawing board to come up with something different than come up with individual protection for the 500 homes?

Mr. Murray: Right now, they are still in the study phase. They are looking at a series of alternatives. Then they will take out the ones that will never be supported by the cost benefit ratio. Things where the cost will be so exorbitant compared to the protection it will provide. The Federal Government cannot support that. They must be saving more money by doing the project than what it will cost them in damages to not do the project. They have not necessarily knocked anything out yet, it is just Ed saying they are pointing that way at this current time. There have been discussions with residents about shifting roadways. Again, I have not seen the economics so we will have to wait and see how the study progresses. There is always the possibility that the communities and the Commission have an opportunity to weigh-in after the initial study is done as to local preference. We will have to wait to see.

COMMENTS FROM THE COUNTIES

Middlesex County – Anthony Panzarino . Thanked Mr. Murray for contacting a resident. Also, the Community Advisory Panel (CAP) reached out to the Army Corps asking them to appear virtually at an Advisory meeting to give an update on the project. Ed has reached out and they will connect in the near future to coordinate that.

Somerset County - Commissioner Melonie Marano . Will the road that is now closed in Middlesex Borough be opened again soon, where the trench & floodwall work is being done?

Mr. Wrocenski: We are projecting the work to be done in Summer and the road to be reopened.

Union County – No representative present.

GBFCC ENGINEER . Rich O'Connor
Nothing to report.

WINNING STRATEGIES . Rob Zucker

(Mr. Zucker was unable to attend. Mr. Murray read his report.)

In February & March Winning Strategies and the Commission worked on the following items:

Pursuant to the last meeting and update by the USACE on the lack of Headquarters action on the project agreement that is needed to access the DRSA funding, Winning Strategies and the Commission met with USACE officials and then later with the Congressional delegation to better understand the implications of the on-going impasse and the reason for the protracted timeframe.

One of the big issues, unlike in most all other projects that USACE undertakes, the Army Corps handles the real estate acquisitions for this project. The agreement was perhaps a little slowed by the uniqueness of the arrangement between the NY District and this project and NJDEP. We have received indications, that will remain the same and NJDEP will continue to have the real estate acquisition done by the USACE.

Conducted outreach to Senator Booker's office, as well as to Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman's office and Representative Tom Keane's office to brief them on the situation just prior to the visits of the Army Corps visiting the congressional delegates in Washington, D.C.

Received an update from the USACE and from Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman's office that the issues have been raised as a priority matter. Good news on that front.

Mr. Murray asked Mr. Wrocenski to reach out to the Real Estate Division to get a ballpark idea for 207 Pond condemnation package as to the status and what might be lacking. Want to be able to continue to work with the congressional delegates to keep things moving.

MEETING ADJOURNED: The meeting was adjourned.

Upcoming GBFCC meeting dates:

June 5, 2024, 7:30 pm . via Zoom

August 3, 2024, In person Memorial Service in Middlesex Borough

October 9, 2024, 7:30 pm . via Zoom

December 4, 2024, 7:30 pm . via Zoom