

GREEN BROOK FLOOD CONTROL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

LOCATION: Middlesex

DATE: August 10, 2024

MEETING CONVENED: 9:30AM

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:

In addition to Chairman Murray of Green Brook, please see appended sign in sheet on final page of this report.

MINUTES

The minutes of the June meeting were approved.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Chairman Murray reported for Treasurer Bill Picard who was not in attendance due to a prior family commitment. All members have paid their assessment for the year, and the bill list was approved.

Three bills were presented to us to be paid:

- 1) Grotto Engineering, our consulting engineer
- 2) Tina Totten for our meeting notices
- 3) Winning Strategies, our consulting federal government relations firm
- 4) US Postal Service, for postage

Chairman Murray reported on ongoing project work and the anticipated schedule, based on information given by Edward Wrocenski, Project Manager for USACE. Chairman Murray noted that utility conflicts on South Lincoln are being worked out, and that it was expected that the flood gates would soon be on site and that USACE is anticipating completion of that work and the road to be reopened by the end of the year.

The Chairman noted that the August meeting has always been special, as we remember the lives lost 51 years ago, and that we are extremely proud of how far this project has come. While we share in the frustration of the passing of time, we are grateful for the efforts of so many that have worked tirelessly over these many years. Meaningful flood reduction has been realized in Bound Brook, where hundreds of homes and dozens of businesses are protected from significant flood risks.

The Chairman noted that construction is ongoing in Middlesex Borough and is in the survey and design stage upstream, which is anticipated to resume later this month. The new project agreement is anticipated to be signed by USACE and NJDEP later in August.

Each year, the August meeting has served as a Memorial to the six lives lost in 1973, in Plainfield and North Plainfield. After TS Floyd, we added the two lives lost in Bound Brook to the list of those remembered. Equally important, the August Memorial has served as a reminder of the damage to life and property, and a call to invigorate the affected communities, to continue to push for protection for the entire 64 square mile basin.

The Chairman stated that now that such a significant financial commitment has been made by Congress, the Commission and the communities need to continue to work together for this common goal. With that money in hand, the next biggest hurdle is acquiring any needed easements, whether temporary or permanent, so that surveying can be completed and construction can begin. It could be through encouraging your neighbor to grant an easement for temporary or permanent access, for the construction or maintenance of the project features. The project is held back by real estate efforts, which can take significant time, and may and does often cause the project segments to be split up, so that work can continue while USACE works on getting the real estate needed to move the segments forward. Uncooperative property owners lead to delays, as condemnation in Federal court is a long, drawn-out process.

The Chairman noted that this Commission was founded 50 years ago, and will exist until everything possible has been done to get flood protections for the entire basin.

The Chairman noted it is important to realize the Federal and State processes for a project of this magnitude take time to complete. Design of each segment, environmental permitting, acquiring real estate, bidding and award, actual construction, inspection review and project close out, certifications needed for the reduction or elimination of flood insurance, and more. All of these steps and more are needed to ensure that the project gets built correctly, in the least invasive way with respect to the environment, and in the proper order, in order to minimize any unintended consequences during construction, such as inducing flooding elsewhere by not building the project in the proper order.

The Chairman noted that while these efforts are ongoing, USACE and the State and Union and Somerset County are re-examining the Upper Basin, where the originally envisioned plan cannot be built for a host of reason, including costs, environmental concerns, and the need for permanent road closure that would result. This re-evaluation of the Upper Basin is occurring with a different USACE team while the construction and continuing design are happening in the lower basin and Stony Brook areas.

MEMORIAL SERVICE

Chairman Murray opening the Memorial Service, welcomed and thanked all for being present. He remembered the lives lost in 1973 and 1999, and the need to continue to advocate for the completion of meaningful flood control measures for the entire basin.

Chairman Murray remembered the lives lost, which included; William Clark (age 57, Plainfield), Stephen Langhorne (age 15, North Plainfield), Richard Sciarretta (age 32, Bernardsville), Jerry Spinner (age 45, Warren), Keith Stewart (age 21, Warren) and Harry Timmons (age 30, Plainfield). The ceremony also remembered Mary Tharp (age 85) and her son John Tharp (age 58), who lost their lives September 17, 1999, during the Downtown flooding in Bound Brook, which was caused by Hurricane Floyd.

Chairman Murray concluded the Memorial portion of the meeting, thanking all of the residents, Commissioners, and Federal, State and Local officials who have worked tirelessly for the Green Brook Flood Control Project. He especially thanked founding Chairman Vernon Noble and his wife Shirley (Green Brook), former Chairmen Joe Debler (Piscataway) and Ted Bassman (Scotch Plains), who recently died suddenly; former Vice-Chairmen Marty Matuskiewicz (Middlesex), Larry Newcombe (Scotch Plains) and John Sweeney (Middlesex) and his wife Pat, who baked homemade treats for so many Commission meetings; former North Plainfield Mayor and long-time Commission Legislative Chairman Frank McArdle.

Also remembered were former Commissioner Tony Addario (Watchung Mayor), Middlesex County Freeholder Director David Crabiel Senator Frank Lautenburg, and State Assemblyman and U.S. Congressman Bob Franks.

Chairman Murray also recognized Treasurer Bill Crosby of North Plainfield, who was a founding Commissioner of the GBFCC. Mr. Crosby passed away in November of 2023. Bill was a true public servant, preferring to work in the background to get things done, rather than gain attention standing out front. He will be greatly missed for his efforts for North Plainfield, Somerset County, and the greater Green Brook Flood community.

Throughout the meeting and for quite some time following the Memorial Service, Chairman Murray answered question that residents had regarding their properties and neighborhoods. There were many concerns regarding started work that has yet to be completed. Chairman Murray noted that while some of this work has been awarded, there are portions that are being still held up due to the ongoing real estate efforts at 207 Pond Avenue, which is still presently in the process of condemnation.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 10:45 AM

Upcoming 2021 GBFCC Zoom meeting dates:

Wednesday, October 10, 2024 – 7:30 PM

Wednesday, December 4, 2024 – 7:30 PM