

GREEN BROOK FLOOD CONTROL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

LOCATION: Virtual Meeting

DATE: February 5, 2025

MEETING CONVENED: 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
Thomas Slowinski . NJDEP
Valarie Bogart . Somerset County
Frank Farrell . Engineer, GBFCC
Rob Zucker . Winning Strategies
Trina Gonzalez Rios . Dunellen
William Scott . Dunellen

Mark Kranz . Middlesex
Oren Dabney . Plainfield
Harry Allen . North Plainfield
Skip Stabile . North Plainfield
John Ferguson . South Plainfield

Mostafa Razzaghmanesh-Watchung
Jen Testa . Green Brook
William Reid

MINUTES

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

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer's report can be found on the GBFCC website. Chairman Murray advised that Somerset County plus 2/3 of the Municipalities have paid their dues for the year. Annual dues for the NJ Alliance for action plus the regular bills were offered and approved for payment, which include Tina Totten for meeting notifications, Grotto Engineering for consulting engineering and minutes transcription & Winning Strategies for government relations consulting.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

The Commission received responses for Government Relations and Consulting Engineer

CORRESPONDENCE

The Commission had some internal emails with USACE confirming that the Executive Order regarding the funding pause would not impede ongoing project work. Additionally, there were some emails regarding debris that was thrown over the wall near Barbara Place in Middlesex, which is in the process of being removed.

ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS . Edward Wrocenski, Project Manager

Funding - We have not heard anything about the funding being negatively affected by the new Administration so that is good news.

Segment C-2 & H . The base contract work is nearing closure. The gates were installed in November. The contractor is doing the curb and gutter work. The base layer of the gravel road has been placed, as soon as it warms up, we will be able to lay the asphalt and reopen the road shortly after that.

207 Pond Property – If you recall, we were using a %Dual Path+ approach . one path being condemnation & the other path being some type of agreement with the property owners. The owner's attorney was to be getting their own appraisal, but that did not happen so that avenue is looking like a less feasible alternative. Condemnation will probably be the way forward for us to acquire the property. The schedule for that, as best as I have, is we'll get that package up to our higher headquarters towards the end of this year and then over to DOJ. It will likely take a year and a half. I realize it sounds like a long time, but this has been a real struggle.

Ongoing work - We have had agreements signed and the funds in place for a couple of months now. Internally, we are looking to figure out how we can proceed. Up until now, we were able to build the segments of the project where we would not induce flooding in other areas. We have reached the point in the project where anything else that we build will induce flooding. Our engineering team has been working over the past few months to update the modeling work. The team finished and it has been reviewed by the Engineering Division Chief. The goal is to now take that information and meet with NJDEP. Trying to get a meeting set up in the next couple weeks. The idea would be for NJDEP to buy in on some additional risk that would happen as a result of building future segments. The modeling has produced some sequencing for us, finally. With NJDEP's blessing, we can hold our long-awaited local stakeholders meeting and have a path forward. If all goes well with the meeting, I hope that towards the end of February or early March at the latest we can start having PDT meetings again on a regular basis and keep folks more informed.

Mr. John Ferguson, South Plainfield: Any inkling that you might even think about looking at the South Plainfield part of the project in 2025?

Mr. Wrocenski: South Plainfield is partially in the Upper Basin and part in Segment I-J-K. The design work has not started yet for I-J-K. We would be looking to our Engineering folks to put out contracts to start the initial investigations for borings and surveys. As soon as I have a schedule, I will share it. What I have been saying all along is that the intention would be to do multiple segments at one time. While we are doing construction in one spot, we can do design work in another spot and keep moving the schedule along.

Lower Basin – Ida Repair Work – I was there today with Valerie from Somerset County. It seems that a substantial amount of that work has been completed and is acceptable. A few punch list items remain, which are weather related, including some seeding and work in the pump station with a hydraulic cement that needs a certain temperature. In March & April that repair work should be done.

Mr. Murray showed a map and explained the segments for anyone who is new to the call or not familiar with the segments. Segments I-J-K would roughly be the area in Green Brook Township & Dunellen Borough. From the Middlesex Borough line to the east. Segment I is in Green Brook, along the Green Brook. Segment J would interact there too. Segment K is on the opposite bank of the Green Brook in Dunellen, leading into the lower portion of the western portion of Plainfield.

Mr. Murray: Any idea of a timeline for when the initial survey work on Segment I-J-K may start?

Mr. Wrocenski: I am pushing for it to start this year. As soon as we meet with NJDEP, we will have a better schedule laid out. By our next Flood Commission meeting, I will have a better idea and a more realistic schedule.

Mr. Harry Allen, North Plainfield: In South Plainfield, you have the Cedar Brook basin coming in from Plainfield and you also have the Bound Brook. Has nothing been done in planning for those two basins? Cedar Brook is being cleaned up by EPA. Actually, at that whole Cornell-Dubilier site, two of the Superfund cleanups are gone and there's another one coming up. Has anyone considered the status of that in this planning?

Mr. Wrocenski: That is Segment E-F-G and that is a number of years off.

Mr. Allen: Is there a connection between the Flood Control project and the Superfund project?

Mr. Slowinski: They are more remedial than flood control.

Mr. Murray: The EPA Superfund cleanup is not going to be widening channels or anything of that nature. They are focused on cleaning up whatever soil needs to be cleaned and closing out their project. It's important work because with any work that the Corps will do later on it is important for the site to be clean.

Mr. Murray summarized all the work that is happening in the segments, where the project is stalled due to the limitation of induced flooding, and projected likely next steps. Also emphasized the outcome of the Upper Basin Reevaluation, and ultimately what is approved by Congress, will be the biggest impact for Segments E-F-G.

Upper Basin - We have the tentatively selected plan, had our milestone meeting in November, and our plan was to continue on to the Draft Report. We were advised we needed to put in an additional resource request to our headquarters and that request has to go up through the ASA CW. There is no one in that position right now. The study is on hold because we are out of funds. As soon as we get approval on the additional resource request, we will continue the work on the draft report. We were hoping to put out that Draft Report using the remaining funding, but unfortunately Headquarters said that everything that has to do with that needs an additional resource request. Our guess on time frame for the study to resume would be August or September.

NJ DEP - Thomas Slowinski

I know residents want to get Lincoln Avenue back open. There have been many delays with the utilities and now the County is not happy with some of the curbing and whatnot. We are working with them to rectify. I believe the gates have been tested and look good.

I want to thank Paul Woska for putting me in touch with your officer. These Floodplain Ordinances are very important. There is a guy who is flipping a house on Barbara Place who took the liberty of throwing debris over the wall and into the Brook. That is not the answer. The guy has been advised and is supposed to have it out as soon as possible. I have another similar issue on Starlit.

I am considering sending a letter to all residents that have easements or back up to either the levee or floodwall. In order for this system to work, people cannot throw debris of any kind over the wall, over the levee or into a discharge chamber and let Mother Nature take it downstream. It will clog

the system up. It is not designed for that. Thank goodness for the Floodplain Ordinances and hopefully they are all being enforced.

I will take some thunder away from Ed, he may have forgotten about this, but we met with Dunellen Borough on the phone last week. Back in 2012, they got a permit to install twin 72-inch culverts underneath the railroad similar to what we did on South Ave. They have the permit in hand, I do not know what the delay has been, perhaps money or approval from USACE. They have asked the Corps to look at their HEC-RAS to see if it is okay to build it now and then put a stoppage in there similar to what we did. The pipes are there but they only allow so much water to go through, so we are not inducing. We met with Dunellen Public Works and C.M.E. is their Engineer Consultant. The USACE is looking at it. Hopefully we get a positive answer that it could possibly be done. It is a big project going underneath the railroad. Might have to disassemble the railroad tracks to do it the right way. Will have to revisit the permit since it ran out after they had it renewed in 2017, but they let it expire. A new permit might be tough, but we'll see.

COMMENTS FROM THE COUNTIES

Middlesex County – No representative present.

Somerset County – Valerie Bogart . Just wanted to say thank you to Corps for the repairs in the Bound Brook section. I like the contractor that is working there. They seem invested in doing the right thing and making repairs for our best interests.

Union County – No representative present.

GBFCC ENGINEER . Frank Farrell

Thank you for bringing us back on board this year. Appreciate it - we enjoy working with you all.

WINNING STRATEGIES . Rob Zucker

Thank you for working with us as well.

Ray referenced the memorandum from OMB which was issued on January 27th and later rescinded. The purpose of that ostensibly was a review of funding, and that is a normal thing for a new administration to do on a changeover, particularly a changeover in parties. What is different about this is that funding related to certain categories of spending, specifically gender, diversity, equity, inclusion, abortion and certain climate funding, remains something that the Trump administration does not want to spend on and has told departments and agencies to stop spending on. I do not think this project is going to get caught up in those portions of Executive Orders and I would hope it does not extend to the USACE projects given the protection of life and property for this project and other projects that USACE undertakes throughout the United States. Given how the early days of the Trump Administration have gone, we are seeing a fair amount of uncertainty and at the very least a wait and see mode. None of this is to be partisan, it is just to indicate it is important for us to track very closely whether any of the reviews or anything else contributes to any delay. We would need to advocate very strongly against any delays, especially given that we are already falling behind on certain timelines, whether it for real estate or other reasons. As just one example, regarding what Ed said earlier, perhaps we

can engage the delegation so as soon as an official in place at Civil Works we can make sure that the sign off on the Upper Basin study happens in as an accelerated fashion as it can. I think we need to be an appropriately squeaky wheel and not otherwise allow anything that is obviously well beyond our control to contribute to work on the project taking longer than it has to.

Mr. Murray: Just want to thank you for your assistance. Woke up to the news of the funding pause and got a very quick answer from you, sharing the OMB memo with me and then follow up with the Corps as well. It put Middlesex Borough at ease. Thank you for your quick work on that, Rob.

Mr. Zucker: One last observation to add is that Congressman Tom Kean, representing part of the Upper Basin, has moved off the Transportation Infrastructure Committee (TNI) and joined the Energy and Commerce Committee. The TNI Committee is what directly has jurisdiction over the Army Corps. In the House of Representatives, Congresswoman Nellie Poe, representing Passaic, Bergen, Hudson District, has now joined the Committee. From the perspective of asking them to do things directly affecting their districts, that is something that Congressman Kean will not be able to do, but his staff is familiar with the project having worked on it in 2024 WRDA. Our job is to make sure they are just as engaged even when off the Committee. Senator Kim is on the Commerce Committee but not the EPW Committee. We look forward to engaging with his office as this is an area that is new to him in terms of the part of the state that he represents.

Other Questions/Comments

Mr. Slowinski: Just want to clarify that the permit in Dunellen I spoke of earlier is for the Bonygutt Brook where it goes under the railroad tracks in Dunellen.

MEETING ADJOURNED: The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 pm.

Upcoming GBFCC meeting dates:

April 2, 2025, 7:30 pm . via Zoom

June 4, 2025, 7:30 pm . via Zoom

August 2, 9:30 am . in person, 707 Legion Place, Middlesex

October 8, 2025, 7:30 pm . via Zoom

December 3, 2025, 7:30 pm . via Zoom