

New Castle City Flood Resiliency Committee Meeting
Minutes
February 20, 2024 – 7:00 p.m.
1 Municipal Boulevard, New Castle, DE

Members Present: Alice Riehl, Chair
Gail Seitz
Tish Gallagher
Fred Gallagher
Timothy Moore
Mike Smith
Sandra Taylor
Michael Marinelli

Also Present: Council President Suzanne Souder
Kevin Donnelly, District Coordinator, New Castle Conservation District

Ms. Riehl called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Roll call followed and a quorum to conduct business was declared.

Mr. Riehl suggested that the Committee become more aware of projects in the city in relation to flood resiliency.

Ms. Riehl noted that she has become aware of rumors in the city regarding flood resiliency, including that \$1M had been awarded to build a flood wall on The Strand; and suggested that updates be communicated to the public. She clarified that nothing will happen without input from the community, stakeholders, and city officials; and that data collection has not commenced yet. Ms. Souder confirmed that no one has been in touch with the city. During discussion, it was noted that the Federal budget has not yet been approved, which may impact any funding awarded to New Castle; however, Ms. Riehl said her impression was that the funds are not contingent on anything. Mr. Riehl will communicate quarterly with updates on the FRC.

Minutes

A motion to approve the November 21, 2023 minutes as amended was made, seconded and unanimously carried.

Update on NRCS

There was no update from Ms. Baldwin of the NRCS. Ms. Riehl noted her understanding that NRCS had contracted the planners. Ms. Seitz noted that the September Minutes reflect that Ms. Baldwin had stated work would commence no sooner than May or June 2024.

Discussion of possible trip to Hoboken to see that city's response to flooding

Ms. Riehl stated that she spoke with Caleb Stratton, Chief Resiliency Officer for the City of Hoboken. Mr. Stratton noted the Hudson River is non-tidal, whereas the Delaware River is tidal; and Hoboken is 90% paved, whereas New Castle has much open land. Ms. Riehl opined that members of the committee take a day trip to Hoboken to speak in more depth with Mr. Stratton

and possibly get some ideas that may work in New Castle. Ms. Riehl suggested going in late March or early April. Mr. Gallagher and Ms. Riehl, Seitz and Gallagher will make the trip. In response to a question from Mr. Marinelli, Ms. Riehl explained her understanding of how the cistern system is being used in Hoboken. Mr. Gallagher suggested that the significance of tidal vs non-tidal rivers be determined before going to Hoboken.

Discussion with Kevin Donnelly of the conservation District, of flooding caused by storms and drainage

Mr. Donnelly explained the difference of flooding in a tidal river vs flooding in a non-tidal river; noting that during a Nor'easter, New Castle experiences rain, wind blowing from the northeast pushing water up the tidal creek, storm water coming down the river, and water elevations can't go down until the wind stops and the tides switch. Regarding the use of cisterns Mr. Donnelly stated that using cisterns in New Castle is more challenging. With non-tidal (the Hudson River) flooding with Nor'easters and high tides, a heavy rain will drain through the tributaries and raise the level of the creeks; and this is less complicated to manage than tidal flooding. Tides keep water in and keep water from draining from the creeks. Ms. Seitz stated that the river has come over the banks at least 10 times this year.

Mr. Donnelly stated that visiting Hoboken is worth the trip from an educational standpoint; however, he pointed out that the geology of Hoboken is bedrock and large underground structures can be built; however, New Castle is mostly soft earth.

Regarding drainage, Mr. Donnelly opined that the more intense and more frequent storm events get, it will become a bigger problem. Mr. Donnelly stated that the NRCS will take drainage into account when considering the issues in New Castle; adding that as with any engineering problem, they will be able to address a large portion of the problems to address larger storms; however, a super storm will still cause a problem. He added that funding for the project will also be a factor as to how much they can address.

In response to a question from Ms. Riehl regarding anything that can be done by the city now, Mr. Donnelly cautioned against addressing issues that may be addressed under the NRCS resolution. He added that the NRCS has generically identified the problems facing New Castle, but without the knowledge of what will actually be addressed by them it would be irresponsible of him to suggest projects that the city might undertake now.

Mr. Donnelly explained that the Conservation District has been a long-time partner with both the NRCS and USDA. He added that it is important to make sure the funding commitment is locked in regardless of what happens in the fall politically. He recommended interaction with the local legislation by committee members. Ms. Riehl will follow-up on communications with them.

Ms. Riehl referenced an article in the New York Times about subsidence along the east coast in which they were specifically concerned about Boston, across Delaware and into Maryland. Mr. Donnelly noted that the geology of the area is critical. He suggested that the committee reach out to the Delaware Geological Survey (DGS) and offered to give Ms. Riehl the name of a contact to have a representative speak about subsidence at a future meeting.

In response to a question from Mr. Marinelli, Mr. Donnelly stated that the Conservation District raised the dikes in 2013-15 as well as some small projects in New Castle. Mr. Donnelly explained the process for an individual to request a project on private property through the Conservation District. Ms. Gallagher noted how well the dikes and berms worked at Bull Hill during the recent storm.

Mr. Marinelli recommended that the committee members and the city draft letters to their senators and representatives recommending that the funding remains in place.

Report on Flood Mitigation on the City Website

Ms. Seitz reported on her comparison of the Delaware City website for information on flooding, emergencies, etc., relative to flooding and how that information is presented on the New Castle city website. She noted a few corrections and updates that should be made and added that many links to government agencies do not work. Overall, she felt that it was much easier to find information on flood mitigation on the Delaware City website compared to the New Castle website. She noted that both the New Castle and Delaware City websites have a very similar format, and they contain the same information on flood plain management; however, the Delaware City website homepage has separate links to “Flood Plain Management” and “Storm Water Management”; whereas on the New Castle webpage, those items are subcategories within the main drop-down menus.

Ms. Souder explained that the city is working with students at the University of Delaware to update the city website. The primary focus of the students is to have them put together a link for Building Projects. The project may also include improving the city website; however, the students may not have time during their semester to include this in the project. Ms. Souder noted that city websites are partially controlled by the State; however, she is not certain of what areas of the website are within the purview of city staff. She suggested that the Committee compile a memorandum detailing the items that need to be fixed or updated; noting that the city staff would be able to update what they can and those items they cannot update can be submitted to the State. Mr. Donnelly suggested that the committee contact the State has a Department of Technology and Information as well. Ms. Souder noted that the students have been given a contact at DTI. Ms. Seitz will take the lead on this project.

Agenda Items for the Next Meeting

The next meeting is May 21, 2024. Agenda items:

- Discussion of City Website
- Discussion of Congressional Outreach
- Discussion of trip to Hoboken

Ms. Riehl asked committee members to contact her with additional Agenda items.

Public Comment

Phil Gross – 1301 13th Street

- Mr. Gross suggested that the committee reach out to WILMAPCO, noting that they have committed to do the drainage on any projects WILMAPCO and the City agree they should work on. Mr. Gross opined that they have agreed on areas to work on. Ms. Souder noted her understanding that Ferry Cutoff is a State Road and the City does not have jurisdiction for that road, and explained the process to have work on the DelDOT calendar.
- Mr. Gross concurred that communicating the timeline with the public is important.

Patrick Pinnell – 105 The Strand

Mr. Pinnell stated that New Castle's flooding is an emergency situation and a 5-year time of action is not sufficient for Historic New Castle. He noted that a group of residents from 101 to 109 The Strand have organized to get legal easements in place. They will be meeting with Mr. Bergstrom to discuss the matter. Ms. Riehl stated that the timeline is not within the purview of the committee. During discussion Ms. Seitz noted that previously residents on The Strand attempted to organize as a group of private property owners; however one resident refused to agree to their proposal, and she joined to the committee to address the issue as a bigger picture to protect the entire city. Mr. Donnelly stated that he would share the information he compiled for the original group with Mr. Pinnell.

There being no further business to discuss, Ms. Riehl called for a motion to adjourn.

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded and unanimously carried, and the meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer