

New Castle City
Flood Resiliency Committee Meeting
Minutes
February 18, 2025 – 5:30 p.m.
1 Municipal Boulevard, New Castle, DE

Members Present: Alice Riehl, Chair
Gail Seitz (*joined at 5:40 p.m.*)
Mike Smith
Timothy Moore
Florence Smith

Absent: Tish Gallagher
Fred Gallagher

Also Present: City Administrator Antonina Tantillo

Ms. Riehl called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. Roll call followed and a quorum to conduct business was declared.

Minutes

A motion was made by Ms. Smith to approve the minutes of the January 21, 2025 meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Smith and was unanimously passed.

Ms. Riehl stated that Melissa Pavone has agreed to fill the open seat on the Flood Resiliency Committee and her appointment will be presented at the March City Council meeting.

Discussion of meeting with USACE and others on 2/6/25

Ms. Riehl gave an overview of the meeting she and Ms. Seitz attended with the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), Representatives Cooke and Minor-Brown, Senator Poore, Kevin Donnelly, and representatives from DelDOT and DNREC.

Ms. Dhringra reported on the flooding situation the City is facing and Scott Sanderson, Chief, Project Development Branch of the Corps, was very encouraging and mentioned a number of programs that could be helpful; including Section 14, that protects areas from erosion. Mr. Ed Voigt of the Corps recommended that the City move quickly to submit a letter to the explaining the flooding situation and asking for help. Ms. Tantillo is currently drafting that communication. Ms. Riehl added that both Mr. Donnelly and Mr. Voigt stated the process can be quite lengthy.

Ms. Riehl also noted that:

- Mr. Donnelly said that the plans that were already made for The Strand would not be considered as a “shovel-ready” project.
- The Corps said that the coastal flooding would be easier for them to work on than stormwater flooding on Rt. 9 due to the research involved with stormwater flooding.

FEMA

Mses. Riehl and Tantillo attended a virtual seminar hosted by the University of Delaware Institute for Public Administration about applying for funding through FEMA. Presenter Phillip Cane, State Hazard Mitigation Officer-Delaware, is willing to assist the City with any applications. Ms. Tantillo has a meeting scheduled with the University of Delaware Biden School Grant Assistance Program (GAP) Team on February 19th to go over applications to submit before the March 18th deadline.

Delaware Sea Grant

Ms. Swallow, Coastal Hazards Specialist of Delaware Sea Grant, informed Ms. Riehl that participation in the University of Delaware Coastal Resiliency Design Study Program for this summer had already been awarded. The Committee will apply next year. Ms. Tantillo will follow-up on this program.

Miscellaneous

- In response to a question from Ms. Smith, Ms. Riehl gave a high-level overview of the NRCS program, and the need to find other sources of funding.
- Mr. Moore spoke with Mayor Johnson of Delaware City regarding their award of \$475,000 under the Community Redevelopment Fund for a study and work to mitigate flooding due to a failure at one of the tidal gates at Dragon Run. Applications for the Community Redevelopment Fund opened on February 10, 2025, and will be accepted until May 1, 2025.
- Ms. Tantillo is working on requests under the Bond Bill; noting that the portion of the project for which funding is being requested must be identified as well as exactly what work the funds will be used for (i.e., continuing study, engineering plans, etc.). Ms. Riehl noted that flooding on Rt. 9 is a priority. Ms. Tantillo stated that she and Ms. Dhringra discussed how the City would apply for grants for both stormwater and riverine flooding. A discussion of the condition of Broad Dike ensued.

Explanation of HAZUS report by Emily Dhringra

Ms. Dhringra explained the HAZUS report for the benefit of the Committee members, how it is developed and how it is used.

- 625 structures in New Castle were examined and of them, 237 were impacted by the 100-year storm event elevation.
- Losses were calculated at \$6M. Ms. Seitz opined that \$6M is too low for the value of the historic homes, particularly some of the homes on The Strand such as the Read House.
- If the dikes were extended and elevated to 13.5' there would be no damage in a 100-year storm event and there would be no losses.
- Ms. Dhringra explained the Benefit Cost calculations, noting that there is no trigger in the HAZUS model to identify historic structures, road closures, or detours; and identified ways the HAZUS report could be enhanced to calculate more benefits. She added, however, that it would be challenging to reach the level of losses to be eligible for funding through a FEMA source.

- Based on the HAZUS analysis and the Benefit Cost Analysis, it does not appear that New Castle would reach the level needed to receive a FEMA grant.

At the conclusion of her presentation, Ms. Dhringra responded to questions from the Committee:

- The proposed extensions of the dike do not cover The Strand.
- The 13.5' dike height analysis shows that there would be no losses, so everything would be protected.
- The report is based on the depth of water in the basement area of the homes for the 100-year event. Ms. Dhringra suggested that the Committee supply her with specific addresses and she would do more research.
- Ms. Dhringra will supply the report results in a format that is easier to read.
- Some government buildings are included in the report.
- Usually, projects that qualify under the FEMA Benefit Cost Analysis are getting flooded at a 10- or 20-year level, and the report is weighted to higher frequency flooding.
- Ms. Dhringra opined that Capital Stock Exposure vs Capital Stock Losses has to do with commercial-type of building, noting that she would have to research that further and get back to the Committee.
- In the present day scenario, 237 residences were impacted.

Discussion of Report to City Council

Ms. Riehl stated that because the City Council meeting was rescheduled, she did not present the Flood Resiliency Committee's Annual Report to City Council yet, and she would report on that at the March meeting.

Additional Comments by Committee Members

- RASCL – Mr. Smith reported that he read the RASCL report, noting that it was 99% on sustainability and 1% on resiliency; and it had very little to do with what the Committee is investigating.
- River Road – In response to a question from Ms. Seitz, Ms. Tantillo reported that DelDOT is working on applying a pervious layer to the roadway so water will go between the layers and not just sit on the roadway. Ms. Tantillo was not certain about the timeline.
- Publicity – Ms. Seitz suggested that the Committee do some publicity of projects that the City and Trust are working on. Ms. Tantillo noted that the Trustees are improving the Battery Park shoreline and pathway. Ms. Tantillo noted that her report to City Council will include more information about those projects.
- City Website – In response to a question from Ms. Seitz, Ms. Tantillo explained the projects that the City is partnering on with the University of Delaware to upgrade the City Website; including improvements and a higher-profile link to the Flood Page.

Public Comment

Bill Blest

Ms. Riehl read a public comment submitted by Mr. Blest regarding vehicles parking on the sidewalk on 3rd Street and the potential for curb damage and the disruption of water flow to storm drains.

Phil Gross – 1301 13th Street

- Mr. Gross stated that the Flood Resiliency Committee must be shelved; noting that if grants are awarded it can be reinstated.
- Mr. Gross stated there is no State or Federal funding for at least three (3) years.

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

A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Seitz. The motion was seconded by Mr. Smith. The motion was unanimously passed and the meeting adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer