

New Castle City
Flood Resiliency Committee Meeting
Minutes
October 22, 2024 – 7:00 p.m.
1 Municipal Boulevard, New Castle, DE

Members Present: Alice Riehl, Chair
Tish Gallagher
Fred Gallagher
Timothy Moore

Absent: Mike Smith
Gail Seitz

Also Present: Council President Suzanne Souder
City Administrator Antonina Tantillo
Emily Dhringra, Civil Engineer, Professional Engineer, & Certified Flood
Plain Manager with AECOM

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

Ms. Riehl introduced Ms. Souder (City Council President), Tantillo (City Administrator) and Dhringra (Civil Engineer with AECOM, who will be working with the committee).

Minutes

A motion to table the September 24, 2024 minutes to the November meeting was made, seconded and unanimously carried.

Committee Member Follow-Up from the September Meeting

Gail Seitz

- Ms. Riehl reported that Ms. Seitz would give her report at the November meeting.
- Mr. Moore stated that he has not been able to reach out to Senator Poore yet.

Update on NRCS

Ms. Riehl updated the Committee on the October 2, 2024, virtual meeting with Diane Gray, State of Delaware Conservationist.

- Ms. Riehl gave a brief overview of the history of New Castle and what the committee has done regarding the Watershed Project.
- Ms. Gray stated that until the Federal Budget is settled there is no way to know how much money will be awarded to the various projects, and noted that the transition due to the upcoming election would cause a holdup in the process.
- The NRCS program is a national program, and the New Castle project is in line with all other projects; and issues in western North Carolina and other national high-profile projects will take precedence. It was also noted that there are no guarantees that the New

Castle project will be awarded any funding despite the fact that New Castle had been declared eligible for the program.

- Previous planning or other planning the City might do is not a factor because the NRCS Program would re-do the planning based on the work to be done.
- Based on the conversation, Ms. Riehl said she was not hopeful that New Castle's project would be approved.
- Ms. Gray suggested that the committee contact State and local legislators to act as liaisons.

Meeting with DNREC

Mr. Moore updated the committee on a recent meeting held with DNREC representatives at Bull Hill.

- The DNREC representatives were extremely knowledgeable on the dike system in New Castle and they gave an overview of maintenance issues that need to be addressed.
- Dikes
 - The Broad Dike has a "cage" around it that is designed to allow debris from the marshes to pass through and to provide access to clear any blockages, while preventing larger debris from getting in.
 - The dikes are equipped with alarms; however, the Broad Dike alarm is currently inactive and that is getting fixed.
 - The dikes are manually monitored by the City Building Official and a representative from DNREC, and they are both able to adjust the gate to drain water to its lowest level to prepare for upcoming weather events.
 - When the dike is cleaned, the debris that is dug out is not hauled away; and it acts like a berm, which is not good. It was noted that hauling wet debris is illegal.
 - A secondary visual alarm is planned.
 - Ms. Souder noted that the log that recently jammed the gate open came from the marsh and not the river.
 - Public Works inspects all the dikes daily.
 - The two gates at Bull Hill still function. Mr. Moore explained how both gates work.
 - The gates at Buttonwood and the Boat Ramp are self-regulating. One of them needs a new gasket, which is not a minor repair.

Ms. Gallagher noted that on a recent trip she saw how debris was being diverted away from a restaurant that was on pilings by chaining logs together and having them wrap around the structure, which was quite effective.

In response to a question from Ms. Riehl, Mr. Moore explained that the flooding on Rt. 9 is caused by riverine slack tides or tides that are higher than normal as well as storm water run-off.

Ms. Riehl reviewed two articles she distributed to the committee members and questioned if there was a way to create a water retention area by expanding wetlands in New Castle. A number of locations were suggested and a discussion of how this could be accomplished ensued. Ms. Gallagher opined that it would help to restrict new development.

Discussion of strategies for taking on smaller projects

Ms. Riehl proposed potential flooding areas that the committee could work on:

- Rt. 9 by Three Countries Pizza
- Rt. 9 going the other way out of the city
- The Strand
- Harmony and 6th Streets

Ms. Gallagher opined that Rt. 9 below Dobbinsville is not a small project; noting that the State and DNREC are working on that area. Ms. Riehl said that she was thinking of a smaller area. Ms. Souder added that area is on DelDOT's 5-year Plan list.

Mr. Gallagher opined that Rt. 9 north of the city is more attainable.

Ms. Gallagher stated that the Strand is mostly private property, and she was not sure those homes were getting water in their basements. Ms. Riehl stated that Ms. Seitz is very keen on having work done on The Strand.

Ms. Gallagher said that she has not seen flooding on Harmony to 6th Street as is seen on Rt. 9. Ms. Riehl stated that flooding on Harmony is not obvious because it is in peoples' yards.

Mr. Gallagher noted that some of the ideas would require changing topography, which would be expensive. Ms. Souder added that Mr. Athey had said when the ditches on Rt. 9 were first dug, the land was higher than the river, but now the river is higher than the land at high tide; and if the ditches are dug out, more water would be let in.

Ms. Gallagher asked if a retention pond incorporated into some open land would be an option. Mr. Gallagher noted that retention ponds have to be kept clean and the water needs to have a place to go.

Strategies for looking for other funding sources

Emily Dhringra

Ms. Dhringra updated the committee on funding sources:

- NOA – NOA has funding for larger projects, but mainly for nature-based projects, i.e., living shorelines, and not large dike construction. Mr. Gallagher noted that The Battery is all a living shoreline. Ms. Dhringra noted that NOA might have funding for that type of project and will keep an eye on upcoming calls for projects.
- FEMA – They have a good, consistent funding program. Submissions close in early fall and open again in the spring. Submissions must be filed through the State liaison. Ms.

Tantillo will reach out to the State Flood Coordinator. FEMA is also funding the Flood Mitigation Assistance Program and the Building Resilient Infrastructure in Communities (BRIC) Program. The BRIC Program targets large community- and region-wide projects and would have the funding levels to do a project like New Castle.

- National Federal Wildlife Federation – They have a National Coastal Resilient Funds and grant programs for coastal resilience.
- Army Corps of Engineers – In response to a question from Ms. Riehl, Ms. Dhringra opined that the Army Corps of Engineers does not have a competitive grant program, but the committee could discuss funding with them.

A discussion of the Benefit Cost Ratio and how it is calculated ensued. During discussion, Ms. Dhringra explained that a “structure is losses avoided of buildings being flooded, business closings, road closures/detours, and road flooding.” Flooding in a residential yard does not count toward the calculation.

Ms. Dhringra noted that the HAZUS model does not have a way to specifically consider the benefits of historic buildings; however, if the replacement value could be documented that could be considered in the HAZUS modeling. The HAZUS model should be finished by the end of the year.

Follow-up

- Corps of Army Engineers – Ms. Riehl
- DNREC – Ms. Seitz
- NOA – Mr. & Mrs. Gallagher
- FEMA – Ms. Tantillo

Additional Comments by Task Force Members

In response to a question from Mr. Moore, Ms. Tantillo explained what Ms. Gray considered “planning” in terms of the studies that have already been done. Ms. Riehl added that what has already been done would not be considered “planning”; and Ms. Baldwin said any planning the City did would have to be redone.

Discussion of agenda for next meeting

- Discussion of funding
- Update from Ms. Seitz

Public Comment

Phil Gross – 1301 13th Street

- Mr. Gross suggested that the room set-up be reconsidered.
- Mr. Gross opined that regarding Ordinance 550 the City Solicitor did not give full instructions by the law, and that he was supposed to let the Commissioners and the voting parties know that it can be retroactive to any project that has not broken ground. He

urged the FRC to make a presentation asking that Council for a total moratorium until the FRC or the City resolves the flooding problem.

- Mr. Gross stated that he as seen water backing up in Battery Park and not draining into the river.
- Mr. Gross commended Ms. Dhringra on her presentation of possible funding.

Ms. Tantillo clarified for the record that Ordinance 550 was recommended by the Planning Commission to City Council; however, the Ordinance has not yet been approved by Council.

Ms. Riehl clarified that the room set up is dictated by the Police Department.

Mr. Gallagher clarified that water in The Battery is coming from the river and is not backing up from the drain, and explained how the manifold in the drain works.

Next Meeting

The next FRC meeting is scheduled for November 19, 2024.

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 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer