

New Castle City Flood Resiliency Committee Meeting  
Minutes  
August 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

Absent: Michael Marinelli  
Sandra Taylor

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 reported that Sandra Taylor stepped down from the Committee.

**Minutes**

A motion to approve the May 21, 2024 minutes as presented was made, seconded and unanimously carried.

**Committee Member Follow-Up from the May Meeting**

Delaware City Floodplain Manager – Ms. Gallagher reported that she contacted Delaware City but was unable to reach the City Manager of Delaware City. She left a message and is waiting for a return call. Ms. Riehl reported that she spoke with the City Administrator about the possibility of sharing a Floodplain Manager with Delaware City. Ms. Tantillo felt it was a good idea. Ms. Riehl opined that action on that would most likely be postponed until City Council begins discussions of the next Budget.

City Engineer – Ms. Riehl also spoke with the City Administrator about hiring a City Engineer. Ms. Tantillo agreed; however, that will also probably have to be postponed until City Council begins discussions of the next Budget.

**Update on NRCS**

Ms. Riehl noted that in July Ann Baldwin was encouraging; however in a communication received last week she said that everything is on hold until the next fiscal year which begins October 1<sup>st</sup>. If Congress passes a budget the project would be on a wait list “but the order of priorities will be construction, design and then planning because the fund allocations want to see more on the ground” which Ms. Riehl took to mean they want to see a shovel-ready project, and New Castle does not have that. Ms. Riehl reiterated the need for a City Engineer. A discussion of the planning that has already been done ensued, during which Ms. Gallagher opined that the kind of planning they are talking about is much more intense than what has been done.

Ms. Riehl stated she would like a City Engineer to advise on the potential cost of planning, noting that Ann Baldwin had told her that she put in \$2M for planning. She added that Council President Souder earmarked funds in the City Budget for this possibility; however, how much the planning would cost is as yet an unknown. Ms. Riehl questioned if the Committee should seek funding in stages and if funding is awarded, then tell NRCS that the project is shovel-ready. Ms. Seitz stated that from her experience if a project is shovel-ready it is easier for funding to be allocated.

Ms. Seitz said that the federal fiscal year begins October 1<sup>st</sup>, and Bonnie Wu in Senator Carper's office stated that the formal request for fiscal year '25 has passed; and the Committee does not know if a request has been put in or not. She added that because it is an election year, many things are in flux.

Ms. Seitz noted questions that need to be answered:

- Is the request in for New Castle for FY 2025?
- If the request is in, what is it for?
- If funding is secured for planning from another source, could the Committee ask NRCS for funding for design and build?

Ms. Riehl opined that the Committee needs to meet with Ann Baldwin and her immediate superior. Ms. Seitz noted that she and Ms. Riehl had presented documentation supporting the need for flood mitigation to Senators Carper and Coons and the Governor's office; and opined that the Committee needs to go back to them. Ms. Seitz also noted that Senator Coons' office suggested that funding could be obtained from the Army Corps of Engineers. Ms. Seitz will contact the offices of the Governor and Senator Coons to see if they can help. Ms. Riehl will research who Ann Baldwin's superior is and schedule a meeting with them, Ms. Seitz and the City Administrator.

Ms. Riehl reiterated that the Committee should research alternate funding sources immediately. She also suggested that the Committee speak with AECOM's Engineer to discuss planning and costs; and she stated that she will discuss this with the City Administrator.

Ms. Gallagher questioned whether it would be better to focus on riverine flooding or tidal flooding instead of a total solution for the City. Mr. Moore suggested that the project be done in phases, opining that it may be easier to receive small amounts of funding more frequently, leading to the overall objective. Ms. Riehl noted that the NRCS solution is for a tidal flooding. Mr. Gallagher concurred with Mr. Moore's suggestion to seek funding for pieces of the whole project and not implement until all the funding is available.

Ms. Riehl questioned how much money would be needed for some of the pieces of the project and Mr. Moore said he will reach out to Kevin Donnelly for his input. Ms. Gallagher noted that the Army Corps of Engineers was heavily involved in the river side of flood mitigation in Hoboken. A brief discussion of how Hoboken has handled funding ensued.

**Committee Plan:**

- Ms. Seitz will:
  - Contact the offices of the Governor and Senator Coons to gather information on the status of the request.
  - Speak with the Governor's office about the Bond Bill.
  - Speak with Andrew from Senator Coons' office about the Army Corps of Engineers.
- Ms. Riehl will:
  - Schedule a meeting with Ann Baldwin, her superior and the City Administrator.
  - Speak with the City Administrator about contacting AECOM's Engineer.
  - Contact the County about the County Engineer.
  - Speak with Council President Souder about a City Engineer and if she knows of anyone with an engineering background to join the Committee to fill the seat vacated by Ms. Taylor.
- Mr. Moore will:
  - Reach out to Senator Nicole Poore to discuss potential funding and the Bond Bill.
  - Reach out to Kevin Donnelly to discuss a ball-park cost for planning.

**Report from Mike Smith on the Flood Insurance Forum**

Mr. Smith attended a Flood Insurance Forum hosted by Danielle Swallow in April and reported on what he learned:

**National Flood Insurance Program (backed by FEMA):**

- A flood covers two units of property or two acres of land. If one house floods, flood insurance does not cover it.
- 40% of flood loss comes from properties being at below or moderate risk in a 100 year flood.
- In 2019 the average flood insurance payout in Delaware was \$18,000. The average loss was \$95,000.
- In 2003 the average flood insurance payout in Delaware from Hurricane Isabelle was \$3,000.

**Private Flood Insurance Program (not backed by FEMA):**

- Mr. Smith asked for a quote on \$50,000 of insurance from a private insurance carrier for his house and basement, and it is significantly less than the National program.
- Private insurance is growing.
- If you have a loan, you must ensure that your mortgage company agrees to take private flood insurance.
- In 2017 private insurance was 7% of the market. In 2024 it is 33% of the market

**Other:**

- FEMA maps do not take into account climate change or sea level rise.

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- The State will do another study on sea level rise this year.
- Sea level has risen 16” over the last 100 years.
- Global warming has given us the same amount of rain, but in shorter, more concentrated windows.
- Nature is the best defense against Mother Nature. The marshes in New Castle are doing their job. Whenever you extend the land to build, the water has to go somewhere else.
- New Castle City is rated 8 out of 10 on the flood mitigation scale for flood insurance. New Castle County is 5 out of 10.
- Double check that your vehicle comprehensive plan covers flood damage.
- DEMA has a mitigation fund and gets funding from FEMA.

**Other Initiatives**

City Website – The City Administrator told Ms. Seitz to send website changes to her.

**Miscellaneous**

- Ms. Seitz agreed to stay on the FRC after her term is up. Ms. Riehl will notify the Council President.
- Ms. Riehl will contact the County Engineer to see if they might be able to give the Committee any help.
- Ms. Riehl will be stepping down as Chair in December. Ms. Seitz said she will think about becoming Chair.

**Next FRC Meeting**

The Committee set the next FRC meeting for Tuesday, September 24<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

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 7:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich  
City Stenographer