

New Castle City Flood Resiliency Committee Meeting
Minutes
September 24, 2024 – 7:00 p.m.
1 Municipal Boulevard, New Castle, DE

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

Absent: Mike Smith

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

Minutes

A motion to approve the August 20, 2024 minutes as presented was made, seconded and unanimously carried.

Update on NRCS

- A virtual meeting has been scheduled for October 2nd at 10:00 a.m. with Mses. Riehl and Seitz from the committee, Council President Suzanne Souder, City Administrator Antonina Tantillo, Ann Baldwin, and Diane Gray, State Conservationist, to discuss the project.
- Ms. Baldwin said that they are waiting for the next fiscal year budget to be passed to learn about future funding for watershed projects. Ms. Riehl has received no indication from Ms. Baldwin that the committee should not be hopeful that funding will be awarded.

Committee Member Follow-Up from the August Meeting

Gail Seitz

- Through communications with Senator Coons' office Ms. Seitz connected with Kate Rohrer, Deputy State Director for Senator Coons. Ms. Rhorer is aware of the project and has discussed it with Ms. Baldwin. Ms. Seitz was told that they would support the project however they can.
- Senator Carper is retiring, so his office is in flux.

- Ms. Seitz connected with Greg Patterson in the Governor's office. Mr. Paterson is in charge of Infrastructure Implementation for Federal Projects for which the State receives funding. The Governor is also transitioning out of office and Mr. Paterson recommended that Ms. Seitz reach out to John Kane, Assistant to Senator Carper. Ms. Seitz is waiting for a return call from him Mr. Kane..
- Ms. Seitz attended the recent Senior Center Event and spoke to Representative Frank Cooke about the project. Rep. Cooke said that he has had meetings with Kevin Donnelly about other flooding issues, and suggested that the members of the committee speak with him further about the project.
- Ms. Seitz recommended that local senators and representatives be kept informed of the status of the project.

Tim Moore

- Mr. Moore spoke with Senator Nicole Poore about the project and the status of the NRCS support. He is waiting to hear back from her.
- Mr. Moore spoke with Mr. Kevin Donnelly.
 - Mr. Donnelly said it might be easier to get a commitment if the project is addressed in small phases rather than as one large overall project.
 - Mr. Donnelly opined that given the dynamics of the river it is unlikely that completion of one portion of the project (i.e., raising the dikes) would seriously impact another area of the city.
 - Mr. Donnelly also said that a conservative ballpark estimate of engineering costs would be 10%-20% of the project; but suggested that it could be between 10% and 15%.
 - Mr. Donnelly said that if the committee would like him to attend a future meeting they should reach out 2-3 months in advance.

Ms. Riehl expressed her surprise that raising the dikes would not seriously affect other areas of the city. During discussion Ms. Gallagher suggested that the committee needs to look at areas where the city is currently flooding. A discussion of which areas might need to be addressed together ensued.

Ms. Riehl suggested that after the October 2nd meeting the committee should reach out to the Army Corps of Engineers about a project for the city. She expressed her concern about how much the city might be required to contribute to a project.

Introduction and Questions for City Engineer

Ms. Riehl introduced Ms. Dhringra. Ms. Dhringra gave a brief overview of her background and qualifications, and her experience working on projects in Delaware and other areas on the east coast. Ms. Riehl gave Ms. Dhringra an overview of the NRCS project.

In response to questions from the committee, Ms. Dhringra stated:

- The basic planning for the project appears to be complete and the engineering concept would need to go into the full design phase.
- Phasing the project might be a planning exercise, or an engineering exercise if you are thinking about flood impacts and which sections would need to be done together.
- AECOM's follow-up study is almost complete. More data is needed to do the HAZUS model, which would provide a Benefit/Costs Analysis for different flood scenarios based on building stock. The HAZUS will tell flood loss avoidance, which would be beneficial when applying for grants. It could also show the benefits of raising the dikes to different levels vs the cost.
- Ms. Dhringra did not think that the historical aspect of New Castle and preserving the historic buildings is considered in the HAZUS model, but will research that and report back to the committee.
- Ms. Dhringra noted a number of funding sources, including the Army Corps of Engineers, FEMA, Infrastructure Bills, BRIC Funding, etc., but said she would like to do more research on grant opportunities. During discussion it was noted that FEMA does pre-disaster mitigation.
- If the design phase can be completed and then sent out to bid, there would be more certainty of what construction costs would be.

Public Comment

Phil Gross – 1301 13th Street

Ms. Riehl read a written comment submitted by Mr. Gross suggesting that the Committee be disbanded.

Additional Comments by Task Force Members

Mr. Moore stated that the committee is not in place to solve flooding; it is here to investigate and recommend ways to minimize flooding in the most effective way possible. He recommended that the committee should try to address a small project that can be completed; and suggested that flooding on the road from the Broad Dyke could be addressed. Ms. Gallagher noted that taking a small project and being successful at it was also suggested during a recent visit to Hoboken, New Jersey by several members of the committee.

Council President Souder recounted the recent blockage of the intake pipe and opined that a metal grate might be effective in preventing debris from the river blocking the intake pipe. A discussion of the merits of making intake pipes more secure from debris floating down the river and how to proceed ensued. Ms. Tantillo has a meeting scheduled with DNREC next week and will bring the dikes up during discussions. Ms. Seitz will set up a call with members of the committee and Representative Frank Cooke.

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

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A motion to adjourn was made, seconded and unanimously carried, and the meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer