



Flood Advisory Committee

Minutes of October 22, 2009 Meeting

- **The** eighth meeting of 2009 for the Cranford Flood Advisory Committee (FAC) was called to order by Rick Marsden at 8:00 PM in room 108 of the Cranford Municipal Building.
- **The** following people were in attendance:
Deputy Mayor Mark C. Smith, Commissioner Martha Garcia, Township Engineer Rick Marsden, John O'Connor of USACE, Charles Defendorf of NJDEP, Union County Engineer Thomas Mineo, Ed Trush, C. John DeCotiis, Leo Coakley, Mike Pender, Ellen Hunt, Joan Varanelli, Joe Musillo, and Louis C. Lambe.
- **The Minutes of the September 24, 2009 FAC meeting** were distributed and individuals in attendance given the opportunity to comment on or correct them. Hearing no requests for corrections, Mr. Marsden requested a motion to accept the minutes for September, 2009. A motion was offered by Mr. Trush and seconded by Mr. Musillo. Subsequently, the minutes of the September 24, 2009 meeting were accepted by attending members of the committee.
- **Township Engineer Updates:**
 1. *Pump Station Plaque:* Mr. Marsden started by stating that the pump station plaque has been received and has already mounted underneath the light. Mr. Marsden was happy to report that the Mr. Sgrois has seen the sign and is pleased with it.
 2. *Riverside Drive:* Mr. Marsden announced that the road striping would begin in the next two weeks.
 3. *Morses Creek:* Mr. Marsden explained that the project is now in phase 4 and most of the work at the moment is being done in Roselle. He noted that this project is ongoing and we in Cranford could benefit from the bylaws if we are to form a similar county commission to aid us in obtaining the necessary funds to help complete our outstanding work. Mr. Defendorf stated that Morses Creek was done because it affected a great number of communities. Mr. Coakley recalled that our committee discussed forming or becoming part of a regional effort to tackle our problem. Mr. Mineo explained that his recollection was that we were going to limit our effort to Union County stating that the original Rahway River Basin Commission was left to wither away because of the lack of interest from the county. Mr. Marsden and Mr. Mineo agreed to further research the bylaws and their applicability to Cranford and report back to the committee.



Flood Advisory Committee

- *Mr. John O'Connor* of the USACE updated the committee on the status of our project. Mr. O'Connor stated that he received \$238,000 of federal money for our project. The federal money is a direct result of the hard work and persistence of Congressman Lance's office. This money will be combined with \$200,000 of matched funds from the state of New Jersey. Mr. O'Connor offered the committee a brief summary of the Corps' involvement with Cranford's flooding problem. In August 2006, the USACE studied the entire basin as well as the Robinson Branch. Next, they performed a complete and comprehensive topographic survey of the Cranford area and all of its utilities. In August of 2009, the USACE got the go ahead to do borings in and around the dikes along the river. This information is being used to perform analysis of the stability of the dike system. While this data is still being reviewed it is expected to be available for review soon. All of the compiled data is being used to update the model of the basin which will give the USACE the ability to tinker with the elevations of dikes and the basin to potentially identify areas where improvements could be made. Mr. O'Connor concluded by saying that the focus now will shift to compiling as much data as possible about the homes and structures inside the flood hazard area. This data would be critical to improving the accuracy and usefulness of the model. The money that has recently been earmarked for Cranford will allow the USACE to conduct a feasibility study for potential improvements in our area.

Mr. Coakley stated that he believes that a lot of the data that the USACE needs to improve the model and help with the feasibility study may have already been compiled by Rick Marsden and the Cranford Engineering Department. He also stated that Mr. DeCotiis may have a lot of the tax data already in an excel spreadsheet. Mr. O'Connor added that the 500 year flood plain has been considered and has been overlaid on the study area. Mr. Trush inquired if the model and or study take into account the human factors that go hand in hand with flooding. Mr. O'Connor answered that the only factors considered are the cost to repair the damages caused by flooding. Mr. Musillo stated that in 1999 the Police collected data from residents regarding their losses; however, this effort was not well publicized and the window to submit data was closed by the time most people got around to it. Mr. O'Connor stated that he needs enough data to properly assess the model. Mr. Musillo stated that it took him about a year to completely realize the actual damages from the flood and he suffered about a 2/3rd loss. Mr. Marsden asked Mr. O'Connor if he could come back and update us of his progress from time to time. Mr. O'Connor agreed to provide updates when possible. Mr. Trush stated that Mr. Musillo makes a good point about the length of time necessary to realize and compile your actual losses. Mr. Trush stated that he proudly keeps good records but speculated that it would take him hours to factor and compile a comprehensive list of his real losses. Mr. Defendorf pointed out that you can get in a lot of trouble knocking on doors and the public needs to appreciate that this is a municipal initiative and the surveyors are not interested in jamming anyone up. The surveyors just need to obtain real and accurate data concerning the losses incurred as a result of flooding. Mr. O'Connor added that the USACE has a set interview form prepared for this purpose. Mr. Trush suggested that in an attempt to protect people's privacy, the USACE might want to protect the anonymity of the residents and consider allowing Cranford to compile the data and turn it over to the corps in a generic fashion to ensure that the data is representative.



Flood Advisory Committee

A frustrated Ms. Varanelli added that we have been doing studies for 12 years now and don't need another one. She then inquired as to where the money recently received will go. We want to do Phase 2B and we want to raise the dikes. Ms. Varanelli added that more studies and no progress is not what Cranford residents want to hear. Mr. Marsden added that he has been doing this kind of work for more than 44 years and the evaluation currently being done by the USACE is unprecedented and unparalleled in Cranford's history so her statement is not really fair. Mr. Varanelli asked if the study goes our way does the USACE take over? Mr. O'Connor stated that if the data leads us there then they would design and oversee the improvements. Mr. Defendorf stated that the state is also sponsoring this project. He added that the USACE is conducting a quality study which will be much better received when we need the real dollars to do the construction. Mr. O'Connor reiterated that this is a long process and while the progress is good there is no imminent plans for improvements. Mr. Defendorf stated that the quickest project that he is aware of is in Long Hill which is in its 12th year. Ms. Varanelli again frustratingly stated "so there is no short term relief in site." Mr. Marsden stated that that is correct and we always knew that. Mr. Defendorf stated that the coffers are almost empty for these types of projects. He added that a Basin wide commission approach to funding may not be helpful since the only two damage centers are Cranford and Rahway. He continued in response to Ms. Varanelli's suggestion to spend the money on plans that Cranford has already paid for design work such as 2.b or phases 3&4, that Cranford can design any project it wants but it may not get permitted because we lack the data from the completed study as well as any knowledge as to what the up and downstream impacts would be. Mr. Marsden stated that we have done what we can on our own and we have spent about 9.2 million to date of our own money. Ms. Varanelli asked if we have raised the dikes yet? Mr. Marsden reported that we have restored them and now need to examine the trees along the dikes to evaluate their potential impact on the ultimate stability. Mr. Mineo clarified that we never intended to raise the dikes. Mr. O'Connor clarified that we would not be able to. Ms. Varanelli asked Mr. Defendorf why DEP was stopping Cranford from desilting the river. Mr. Defendorf responded that Cranford has been applying for permits and it is not an easy process to navigate but it has gotten better recently. Mr. Defendorf added that the commissioner is aware that the system could be more user friendly. Mr. Musillo asked if there was a way to obtain a general permit to continuously desilt. Mr. Defendorf responded that such a permit would not be issued but small incremental sections would be approved separately and with greater ease. Mr. Musillo added that the process is costly and Mr. Marsden speculated that it is only going to get worse. Ms. Varanelli repeated that the reality is that if another storm hits and there has been no improvements, we will just continue to be frustrated and disappointed. Mr. Marsden stated that there has been progress even though it is not tangible. Mr. Musillo complained that our legislators don't understand our frustration. We need funding for 2.b and phase 5! Mr. Smith stated that since 1999 things have happened and our legislators are aware of our plight. Mr. Smith mentioned the pump station, dike improvements, studies and improvement designs have been accomplished in this time and Mr. Bramnick's office is aware and is helping on the state level. He also mentioned that we have even given the county considerable amounts of money to purchase lands for us.



Flood Advisory Committee

Mr. Trush asked if there is work that can be done while the USACE conducts its study? Mr. Marsden stated that Phases 3 & 4 are out but we can do 2.b and 5 if we had the money. Mr. Coakley stated that the Hatch Mott MacDonald study was done before the flood hazard rule changes that rule out phases 3 & 4 without mitigating their impact. Mr. Coakley further explained that the USACE is going to examine all storm scenarios and any proposed improvement must be designed so as not to create any subsequent collateral impact on any of the surrounding areas. Mr. Pender stated that improvements in Phases 3 & 4 were never introduced or presented to the public. It was only studied. Mr. Smith asked Mr. O'Connor to clarify if the USACE was the decision maker for the Rahway River? Mr. O'Connor replied yes but the immediate responsibility has been delegated to the NJDEP. He added that to execute the changes in the proposed Phases 3 & 4 would require costly upstream and downstream improvements to make it affective. Mr. Trush asked Mr. O'Connor how soon the study would be ready. Mr. O'Connor stated that he would be done with the study of the stability of the dikes and he would update the hydrology study of the Lenape Basin Control structure by early summer 2010. Ms. Hunt asked if the lake in the park would be included and Mr. O'Connor replied yes. Mr. Coakley added that there is a considerable amount of storage in the park. Mr. O'Connor stated that this year we will build the model and work on the study. Ms. Varanelli asked what happens after the study. Mr. O'Connor stated that the USACE would make a recommendation and then fund the improvements. Mr. O'Connor stated that Springfield underwent the same process and took the completed study and design and built it on their own. Mr. Defendorf conceded that naturally Cranford would like this phase to be over ASAP but it has to acknowledge that improvements are not on the horizon. He also mentioned that the model is worth the wait because it can be applied to anything and could prove very useful for planning.

Mr. Musillo posed a general question to committee asking why we are not going after money to get the projects that we can do on our own, done? Mr. Smith responded that the committee and the township are doing everything they can to pursue public funding for our project. Mr. Trush took the opportunity to thank the gentlemen from the NJDEP and the USACE for the clarity and candor of their responses to our questions. Mr. DeCotiis also stated that he is not happy with the news the committee received this evening but definitely appreciative of having a clearer understanding of the process. Ms. Varanelli stated that she knows that the township has done all that it can to fund the necessary improvements but feels like the county has fallen short of doing their part. She added that she too is unhappy with the outlook but happy to hear the bad news of no imminent improvements straight from the horse's mouth. Mr. Trush stated that not all of the news received this evening was bad and he looks forward to the study results. Mr. Trush asked Mr. Coakley what he thought about the cost benefit analysis. Mr. Coakley explained that he expects that the USACE will study different storm types and produce a model that will tell us the cost of potential damages and feasibility for improvements that are broken down into something like a dollar per incremental foot scale. Mr. Marsden decided to end the meeting on an up note by reporting to the committee that there may be some money left over from the 9.2 million borrowed for the pump station which may make it possible to finish 2.b.

- *Mr. Smith* polled the committee to see if there would be any objection to the next meeting being held on Thursday, December 3. Hearing no objections the motion was carried.
- *Mr. John DeCotiis* made a motion to close the meeting and it was seconded by Mr. Smith at 9:45PM.