



City of Freeport
Town Hall Meeting
Re: 3rd Ward Flood Mitigation

St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church ♦ 607 East Stephenson Street ♦ Freeport, IL 61032

MINUTES
TOWN HALL MEETING
TUESDAY, MAY 8, 2018
6:00 P.M.

A Town Hall meeting was held on Thursday, February 22, 2018, at St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, 607 East Stephenson Street, Freeport, Illinois at 6:00 p.m. regarding flood mitigation east of the Pecatonica River in the 3rd Ward.

Representatives of the City of Freeport in attendance were: City Manager Lowell Crow, Director of Public Works Dennis Carr, Mayor Jodi Miller, Alderpersons Art Ross, Peter McClanathan, Andrew Chesney, Tom Klemm, and Sally Brashaw. City Clerk Dovie Anderson was present to take minutes.

Also present: Adam Holder from Fehr Graham, Ron Davis with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), Andrew Crutchfield with Freeport Housing Authority, and Alan Zais with the Winnebago County Housing Authority

At 6:13 p.m., Reverend Antwon Funches welcomed everyone to St. Paul Church and introduced 3rd Ward Alderperson Art Ross.

Alderperson Ross welcomed the many people in attendance and introduced City Manager Lowell Crow.

Manager Crow stated that this was an informational, town hall-style meeting and the first step in a long process to address flood mitigation east of the Pecatonica River. He stated that this meeting is to provide information to residents and receive input from residents. He introduced Andrew Crutchfield with the Freeport Housing Authority, Alan Zais with the Winnebago Housing Authority as a representative of the voucher program, Adam Holder from Fehr Graham, and Ron Davis with IDNR. The Army Corps of Engineers was invited to attend but were unable to send a representative. They provided a letter.

Manager Crow provided a map showing the Pecatonica watershed that encompasses southwestern Wisconsin and northwestern Illinois with Freeport being at the very end of it. All the water that starts in Wisconsin flows down into the area east of the Pecatonica in Freeport. In the 1980s, the area east of the Pecatonica River in Freeport was designated a floodway. A floodway means that, when the river

crests, this is the natural flow of the river. A floodplain incorporates the floodway and the flood fringe. During last February's flood, he could physically see a rapid current flowing in the streets.

A floodway would require building permits approved by both the State and City for construction. Residents are eligible for flood insurance, even though they may have been told otherwise. If a natural disaster happens in the area, other programs can kick in. He dispelled talk that the City wants to take residents' houses. He would like to gather information of what residents would like done. He would like to distribute information on programs that are available. This meeting is to start the conversations regarding what residents would like to do east of the Pecatonica.

One thing that has been done is to create green spaces where properties have been demolished. The City is moving to take custody of those and designate them as green areas. The City is installing a bike path which is being paid for by federal monies. A bike path is allowed in a floodway. No additional businesses will be added in the floodway. Any building permits need to be issued by the State and the City and the construction cannot restrict the flow of the river.

Manager Crow stated that available housing programs will be presented and questions will be answered.

Manager Crow gave historical data. There was a relatively dry period from 1990 to 2008 where the Pecatonica did not rise above 16 feet. On average, the river rises above 16 feet once every four years. It goes above 17 feet once every 25 years. The 17 foot level has not been reached in 40 years. It is believed we are due for the big flood. The 17 foot level was predicted to occur during the flood in February due to levels being measured in Wisconsin. In preparation, the Salvation Army, Fire Department, and rescue boats were pre-staged east of the Pecatonica.

Manager Crow is working with IDNR to develop a Comprehensive Flood Response Plan to be able to give warnings 18 to 24 hours ahead of flooding conditions.

In 1996, the Army Corps of Engineers did a study for the area east of the Pecatonica. A proposed retention pond area was studied. There is no way to hold back the water. This area is at the bottom of a watershed. If levees were built, it would cause the river to rise 2.5 feet.

Questions were posed by the public.

It was asked if the Pecatonica River could be dredged or cleaned out. Manager Crow stated that he will ask the Army Corps of Engineers about dredging.

It was asked if addition of the Highway 20 bypass contributed to higher water levels in the Pecatonica. Manager Crow stated that he would need to get that information from the Army Corps of Engineers.

Some residents felt that some areas of town never used to flood. There were comments that construction has taken place underground re-directing water and storm water to these areas. Manger Crow responded that he would need to follow up with an engineer to get that answer.

Another resident asked about a drainage system for the streets. Manager Crow responded that storm water drains flow directly into the Pecatonica. When it floods, the Pecatonica runs back into the storm water drains.

Manager Crow stated that each time the Pecatonica River floods, the City will try to respond better.

There were comments that the City did not offer adequate assistance after the flood in February, including providing housing in a hotel or checking if residents had enough money for temporary housing. Manager Crow stated that Red Cross had a shelter at Highland Community College (HCC). The Fire Department transported people to HCC once they were evacuated. At one point, 22 residents were sheltered at HCC. He added that new City staff is learning with each flood incident how to better respond. They would like to get notifications out earlier and work more closely on how to address flooding.

Additional comments from citizens in attendance included:

- The City reaching out to residents to let them help themselves.
- The facts as presented at this meeting differ from residents' recollection, including:
 - o National Flood in 1992 or 1993
 - o Flood waters enter differently than they used to
- If the Colorado River can be changed, so can the Pecatonica River.
- Additional studies need to be done on how to stop the flooding.
- Grant money that was received over the years for the East Side was diverted to different projects.
- The City has neglected the infrastructure on the East Side for too long.
- There was disagreement regarding discontinuing new businesses on the East Side. Gave examples including Modern Plating booming. (Manager Crow stated that Modern Plating is not in the floodway.)
- Concern over the City developing Walmart and Penney's mall in areas that used to flood but not investing in new business on the East Side.
- Frustration over being told repeatedly by the City that there is nothing that can be done about stopping the flooding and the same reasons repeatedly why something cannot be done.

One speaker questioned the \$85,000 that Manager Crow referenced on TV during the February flooding. Manager Crow responded that those funds are for removing empty houses.

It was asked if there were flood gates on the Hancock Bridge. Manager Crow stated that there are not flood gates on the Hancock Bridge, which is downriver and would only cause more flooding throughout Freeport.

Another question was regarding the City's decision to invest in a bike path through the 3rd Ward but not the residential area. Manager Crow stated the bike path will complete a larger network of bike paths from Chicago to Galena with a connection to the Jane Addams trail in Freeport that goes into Wisconsin. There are plans for the bike path to cross over the bypass. The speaker asked for clarification as to why funds can come from other agencies for the bike path but the City does not invest in the 3rd Ward. Manager Crow stated that the City has applied for federal grants to update the Hancock Bridge. IDNR had a representative at the meeting to talk about other funding. The City is also working with Winnebago and Stephenson Counties and the Freeport Park District for an Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP) grant for the bike path. He stated that he is looking at the infrastructure as a whole across the entire City. The Integrated Capital Improvement Plan will go to City Council next week itemizing infrastructure developments over the next five years.

Additional comments from citizens in attendance included:

- East Side remediation proposal was drafted several years ago. The remediation steps were used for Yellow Creek but not the Pecatonica River.
- The residents are not in favor of a bike path and a boat dock.
- The interests of the City are not the interests of the residents. The elderly would not have a use for bike paths and boat docks. They are interested in saving their houses, beautifying the land, maintaining their relationships, and building up their community.
- A pump exists under the baseball diamond that pumps water.
- The City makes decisions for the residents without asking for the residents' input.
- There was no agenda provided ahead of time for the meeting.
- One speaker stated that she tries to keep her home decent. Regarding insurance for her house, she is unable to afford insurance.
- The drinking water has oil floating on the top and is not drinkable.
- Residents of the 3rd Ward pay taxes and they want to know what is done with that money.
- The streets need repair.

One speaker expressed the feeling that there are plans to remove them from the East Side. Manager Crow stated that that is not the plan. There are empty houses scheduled for demolition but no plans to remove residents from their homes. He stated that he has met with Reverend Funches and Joy Sellers on how to proceed going forward. Ms. Sellers referenced the Plan previously developed for East Side Remediation and that Plan is being looked at. As the City develops green spaces on empty lots, Manager Crow would like residents' input on what they would like to do with them.

There was concern over residual left from the old battery plant and contaminated topsoil. Manager Crow stated that brownfields have been developed in that area. One brownfield was recently finished in the area of Jackson and Hooker. The City is currently working on remediation of other areas with federal grants. Another speaker expressed concern over the mess left at the Jackson and Hooker site. Manager Crow stated that the soil remediation has been completed, and we are entering the season where landscaping can be finished as well.

Additional comments from citizens in attendance included:

- Taylor Park School parking lot was installed over contaminated soil.
- A study needs to be done on how many people have died from cancer from eating vegetables grown in contaminated soil in gardens and the drinking water.
- The East Side is contaminated from illegal dumping from Burgess Battery, Micro Switch, and funeral homes.
- The City has been lying to the residents of the East Side for years.

One speaker asked about the organization of the plan for addressing the flooding issues on the East Side and the process of bringing City staff up to date on the history. Manager Crow stated that this is the first engagement meeting to get feedback from community members. He and staff have reviewed existing documents. When asked about a written plan outlining the steps, he stated that it is not available for public viewing at this time. At this point, he is just gathering information. The next step in the process is to address residents' questions, continue gathering information, and continue working with the State for available funding. IDNR is here to present available funding that has already been discovered. Then, establish a response plan for additional flooding. Up to this point, the IDNR has had discussions with the Army Corps of Engineers and Manager Crow will have a conversation with the Army Corps of Engineers in the future. They were invited to tonight's meeting to hopefully contribute to this

discussion, but were unable to send a representative. Manager Crow has spoken with Paul Osmon of IDNR about obtaining Flood Mitigation Plans from other communities regarding best practices. Manager Crow stated that he would like to establish a group of community leaders to share these plans with. The speaker then asked, after hearing comments from residents, what was going through Manager Crow's mind and heart. Manager Crow responded that his heart aches for the affected residents. He wants to provide support to help meet the needs of the residents. He appreciates the knowledge and background provided. He plans to engage a group of residents in the process.

It was asked if the goal is to help alleviate problems or stop flooding. The speaker felt there was a lot of talk about insurance, housing programs, and how to help *after* the flood. Manager Crow stated that his goal was information sharing between him and the residents, present programs that are available for assistance, and respond to flooding. The speaker felt her questions were not answered directly. She also felt that questions regarding storm drainage were avoided.

Andrew Crutchfield stated that he believed that 95% of the people at the meeting had hoped this was a presentation on how to stop the flooding. He was disappointed to hear that no new businesses would be allowed. He was hoping to hear "this is what we can do", not "this is what we can't do". He reiterated that the Colorado River was diverted to build the Hoover Dam; he believes there must be something that can be done in Freeport. When he came to Freeport, he felt sorry about the flooding. When he became an alderman, he was gung ho because he felt he could help fix some problems. But, he realized that he then became a part of the problem because nothing was done. He was disappointed that he was not hearing of a way to alleviate the flooding, but ways to help after it floods. He feels it was a waste of his time if the discussion does not involve how to stop the flooding.

It was asked if the school and houses would be relocated. Manager Crow stated that the school district has no plans to relocate the school. The Housing Authority tried to get homes in the RAD program, but the federal government turned it down because it is in a floodway.

Reverend Funches suggested that we begin talking about possible solutions.

- One possible solution from the City's perspective is to offer buyouts. The home would be purchased at value. However, he realizes this is asking someone to take on another mortgage. He does not see that as a viable option.
- A second solution is to shore up the levees around the Pecatonica River using the map provided. Cost is an issue. Manager Crow confirmed that the cost would be over \$160 million and the Army Corps of Engineers ruled out that option in 1996.
- A third plan, developed in 2014, was to shore up part of the area, but redirect the water when it floods. This plan was also scrapped.

Reverend Funches stated that the City's solutions and the wishes of the residents are at two different ends of the spectrum. He suggested something be done to get both ends of the spectrum to come together. He suggested including engineers in the discussion and having the entities (who had not been heard from yet tonight) to give their technical analysis.

Reverend Funches has read documentation from up to 25 years ago regarding funding coming into the City but being diverted to other areas. He asked why FEMA funding can't be used for issues such as sewer lines and streets. He realizes the water cannot be stopped from flowing, but maybe it is possible that it can be diverted.

Reverend Funches pointed out that some residents are interested in finding a way of moving. Many of these residents also cannot afford to move. He believes it is the City's and community's responsibility to help them find the best living conditions possible.

Reverend Funches recommended that some community leaders and activists come forward to join with the City in developing a plan that is acceptable to residents and the City. He cautioned that these leaders should be able to take the heat just as Manager Crow was taking some heat at tonight's meeting. Manager Crow was very accepting of this idea. Reverend Funches recommended transparency in discussions. He suggested community leaders come forward with soluble ideas, not just complaints. He cautioned that everyone may not end up happy, but stressed that there is a job that needs to be done.

There was a question regarding the amount of funding going into the bridge and water and sewer in the 1st Ward. City Manager Crow stated that the Gladewood Bridge in Krape Park will be receiving \$1.7 million in funding. He added that the Hancock Bridge will be receiving more than \$5 million. He explained that water and sewer are incorporated into the bridge so that also has to be replaced when the bridge is removed.

Additional comments from citizens in attendance included:

- There is distrust towards committee members speaking on behalf of individuals. The speaker said that she is "East Side by choice" and not everyone can speak for her.
- There is an East Side Task Force report that exists with ideas that have already been developed.

Manager Crow asked that volunteers for the committee give their names to Adam Holder. He thanked everyone for coming out and offering their comments.

The Town Hall Meeting ended at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dovie L. Anderson
City Clerk