

To: City Administrator Antonina Tantillo, City Council President Suzanne Souder and Members of the New Castle City Council

From: Alice Riehl, Chair of the Flood Resiliency Committee

Thank you for giving the Flood Resiliency Committee an opportunity to report on our activities over the last 12 months and to tell you what we will be addressing in the coming year.

At the beginning of 2024, we were awaiting the funding of a project to address our need to protect the City from catastrophic flooding and to deal with more common flooding due to substantial rain events. We were declared eligible for this project under the Watershed Protection Program of the Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service in May of 2023. However, by the middle of 2024 the funds had still not been allocated, and we were concerned that the funds might not be available in the near future. We spoke to the new State Environmentalist of the NRCS, Diane Gray, and she was not encouraging. Therefore, we began looking for other resources.

Because of the change in focus, we also increased the frequency of our meetings from quarterly to monthly.

Our search for funding led us to the US Army Corps of Engineers. We contacted the Philadelphia office and they responded with some encouragement. This led to a meeting of Corps officials, City officials, DNREC representatives and representatives of elected officials on the national, state and local level in New Castle. We met on February 6. I am writing this before the meeting, so I cannot report on its results in this document. (I will summarize the meeting and its follow-up when this report is presented to the City Council.)

We have also been in contact with Sea Grant Delaware and RASCL (Delaware Resilient and Sustainable Communities League). Through them, we have a possibility of being the subject of the University of Delaware program called the Coastal Resiliency Design Studio, which designs projects to address flooding problems in coastal cities in Delaware.

Our focus now is on getting the funding to plan and implement a project to address the flooding on Rt. 9 coming into and leaving New Castle. We are also looking for funds to plan a larger project to address the possibility of catastrophic flooding. That will likely require a planning grant first, which we will be seeking. All of these efforts could be hindered by the Federal Government's requested freeze on all funding from federal agencies, and the possibility that such funding does not return in the near future.

As to other questions that were asked in the City Administrator's letter:

Education. Our members continue to attend relevant meetings, webinars and seminars that address flood and resiliency issues. Of our members, only Alice Riehl, Tish Gallagher and Fred Gallagher have attended FOIA classes.

Guidance. We would like the City Engineer to attend all of our meetings. None of us have an engineering or resiliency background and often we find ourselves unable to move forward until we have an answer to a question that only an engineer would be able to answer. Before his death, David Athey attended every meeting, and his knowledge and experience were invaluable. Currently, we have AECOM's Emily Dhringa, as our engineer, but she has not been able to come to every meeting.

Openings. We currently have one opening on our committee. Melissa Pavone, who has an extensive educational background and practical experience in city planning has expressed her willingness to join the Committee. That appointment should come before the Council in March. Our current members are Alice Riehl, Chair, Fred Gallagher, representing the Trustees, Tish Gallagher, Gail Seitz, Tim Moore, representing Good Will Fire Company, Mike Smith, and Florence Smith.

Complaints. The only complaints we have received have arrived through the City offices.

Budget. We have not had input into our budget in the past. In the coming year, our request is to have enough budget for the City Engineer to attend all meetings and to do requested follow-ups. Depending on our outreach we may need grant-writing assistance.