

Regional Flood Mitigation Meeting

Thursday, April 8, 2021 at 6 PM

Virtual Meeting

Although each municipality in our region has a robust stormwater management program, continued coordinated efforts to address the regional threat to health, safety and welfare caused by flooding is critical. The City of Highland Park hosts regular regional flood mitigation meetings whereby various units of governments provide updates on their efforts and the collective opportunity to address this matter.

There were a total of 26 participants at the meeting.

Government Partners:

- Congressman Schneider
- Senator Morrison
- Representative Morgan

Municipalities:

- City of Highland Park
- City of Lake Forest
- Village of Deerfield
- Village of Glencoe
- Village of Lake Bluff

Lake County Commissioner Paul Frank & Stormwater Management Commission

East Skokie Drainage District

Army Corps of Engineers

- **Welcome**

Mayor Rotering welcomed the panelists and attendees. She provided an overview and purpose of this meeting.

- **Legislative Reports**

Mayor Rotering indicated that Congressman Schneider was not able to attend the meeting this evening due to another community program, although flood mitigation continues to be a top priority for his administration.

Representative Morgan thanked Highland Park for coordinating these meetings and keeping this important topic a top priority. He stated that \$122M has been allocated in the State budget focused to Lake County stormwater management. Due to the pandemic and associated financial challenges, the funding has not been released. He and Senator Morrison continue to follow-up with all legislators to prioritize and get the funding out as soon as possible. The funding is derived from Motor Fuel Tax and gaming, both of which were impacted by the pandemic. He is cautiously optimistic that the State will fund part of the \$122M for projects in the coming fiscal year. Representative Morgan noted he talks to the budget staff at least weekly and emphasizes that stormwater management is a priority.

Senator Morrison noted that the work on Deer Path in Lake Forest is on track and will have an indirect benefit to Highland Park. She will continue to listen to the municipalities and residents in the District.

- **Municipal Reports:**

- **City of Highland Park**

In 2018 the City undertook a stormsewer master plan. The plan included work for better drainage in specific neighborhoods. There is \$24M dedicated for stormwater improvements in the City's 10 year capital budget. In the last two years, improvements were conducted in Tanglewood and in the Taylor/Perennial neighborhood whereby backflow preventers were installed. Whenever a street or storm sewer project is conducted in a low lying area, these backflow preventers are considered and advanced.

The study is advancing a two-year study in the following areas, working in partnership with the Army Corps. The goal of the study is to provide options so the City can implement initiatives in concert with SMC and neighboring communities.

In addition, two years ago, the City implemented the SMC's buy-out program.

The City is working with all levels of government and continues to have stormwater management a top priority. Residents are encouraged to visit the City's web site at www.cityhpil.com for more detailed information.

- **City of Lake Forest**

The City partnered with IDOT on an important project in their community at Rt. 41 and Deerpath. The City donated land for a pump station replacement; the project will also provide relief to flooding in the area. The work will also create a restricted release into the river. The civil work will be done this year and the pump station will be done next year.

Locally, the budget includes \$4.5M neighborhood stormwater project; the City is awaiting DCEO funds as referenced by Representative Morgan. Other projects include ravine work, stormwater improvements and bluff stabilization.

- **Village of Deerfield**

A Village wide storm sewer and residential drainage improvements study is completed. The study was undertaken with public feedback on local drainage problems. The study will identify areas requiring storm sewer upgrades and will also identify local neighborhood drainage improvement areas. Overall, 42 projects are planned and underway as part of the Village's Master Planning efforts. Village is considering implementing a stormwater utility fee.

- **Village of Glencoe**

The Village maintains more than 70 miles of sewer pipe and main. This year's budget is focused on maintenance on the system with two storm sewer projects, although significant projects were undertaken over the years.

At Tuesday's election, the Village received approval for \$4.1M for stormwater improvements and \$59M for street resurfacing, sidewalk improvements and other capital projects that benefit flood mitigation.

- **Village of Lake Bluff**

Lake Bluff representatives were unable to attend tonight's meeting. Information about their activities can be found on their web site.

- **Lake County Stormwater Management Commission (SMC) Report**

Commissioner Paul Frank introduced and welcomed Fox Lake Mayor Donny Schmidt serving on the LCSMC Board and introduced Executive Director Kurt Woolford.

SMC has four major flood mitigation projects; three of which are in the North Branch and Lake Michigan Water Shed. Two projects are detailed as follows:

- \$10M North Chicago, flood storage which will benefit the head waters in the area and others along the Skokie River.
- Waukegan, between Rt. 120 and Washington Street. Wetland complex has been identified for storage. There is a plan to provide enhanced wetland and storage. This area will benefit the headwaters and the Skokie River properties.

A quarterly report will be issued to legislators and municipal partners providing an update on SMC projects.

Grant funding assistance is available to Homeowner Associations.

Chicago River Day is May 8. Clean-up will be provided along the river in Briergate.

SMC has made good progress on the home buy-out program. Five properties were purchased in Highland Park. The City of Highland Park planted a pollinator garden on two properties. As part of the buy-out program, the structures are demolished and the properties remain open, green space. It was noted that since the housing market is booming, residents have had a difficult time finding alternate housing. SMC works with each homeowner so they can move at their own pace. Grant funding is sought every year for the home buy-out program. The location of the home is determined based on a number of measures as determined by FEMA. 75%-100% of funding for the home buy-outs are from FEMA. Homeowners are not forced from their homes; this program is voluntary.

- **East Skokie Drainage District (ESDD) Report**

ESDD completed Phase 1 construction in 2020 in Lake Forest. This was a remediation and stabilization project. Phase 2 is on hold. ESDD is reviewing funding sources. A grant proposal has been submitted; the District is eager to move forward. In the interim, ESDD is also planning for other work south of Old Elm, in Highland Park. The project is driven based on funding availability.

- **Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) Report**

Planning to kick off a study within four targeted areas within Highland Park: Highlands, Taylor/Perennial, Briergate and Tanglewood. The purpose is to build upon the regional study in July 2019. The purpose is to review these specific areas and identify alternatives that could be implemented at the local level to address remaining stormwater and flooding issues. Hydraulic modeling, conceptual designs and cost evaluation will be pursued. The study agreement was executed last Wednesday. The study will take 15 months to complete. The cost is \$125K; cost share 50/50 between the federal government and Highland Park. Highland Park will provide half of its share in in-kind services and funding is provided by SMC as well. The federal funds were received yesterday, April 7, 2021.

- **Questions**

Inquired why Park Avenue near Rt. 41 is not included in the ACOE study referenced. It was noted that the four areas are in low lying areas with more homes in Highland Park, compared to flooding on Park Avenue West area. In addition, the bridge near Park Avenue is planned to be rebuilt in the next 2-3 years. As part of that project, the bridge will be constructed with a higher flood level providing additional storage under the bridge.

Request for details about the buy-out program. It was relayed that anyone can apply for the program. An intake questionnaire should be completed by the homeowner providing the SMC information about the property. Generally, everyone qualifies. FEMA has traditionally sought homes with the most severe flood damage to mitigate first. Many of those homes have excessive claims. SMC strives to find any kind of funding for the buy-out program. Sharon Osterby offered to meet with anyone interested to discuss their specific properties. There are some homes that don't have a strong case based on the demands of funding and this program.

At intense flood events, the underpass floods at the viaduct. The water sits until the storm sewer downstream recedes. The goal of the aforementioned project is to have the water in the retention pond and then release in a controlled manner to minimize the impact on individuals. Multiple ponds throughout the Skokie River are needed to further minimize the impact on neighborhoods.

What plans does the City of HP have for the extremely undersize storm sewer on Lake Avenue, and when will the street be resurfaced? It was noted that when Lake Avenue is resurfaced the storm sewer will be upgraded to the 10-year standard.

A resident thanked all panelists for working on this important topic.

- **Next Steps**

The City will continue to coordinate this meeting annually, and will schedule more frequently if needed.