



Ad Hoc Stormwater Utility and Flood Mitigation Advisory Group

April 20, 2023 | 6:00 p.m. | Hybrid (Virtual and In-Person) Meeting

Minutes

Advisory Group Members Present:

P	John Chapman	P	Howard “Skip” Maginniss
P	Dino Drudi	P	Brian Sands
P	John Hill (Chair)	P	Janette Shew
V	Cheryl Leonard	P	Christine Thuot
		P	Katherine Waynick (Vice-Chair)

P = Present A = Absent V = Virtual (on call)

Staff Present: Jesse Maines, T&ES Division Chief, Stormwater Management;; Mitch Dillon, DPI; Brian Rahal, T&ES; Terry Suehr, DPI; Erin Bevis-Carter, Sanitary Division Chief; Dan Medina, DPI

Action Items are in bold.

The meeting began at 6:00pm. With 8 Ad Hoc Group members present in person, quorum was met.

1. Electronic Meeting Notice

Mr. Hill read the electronic meeting notice.

2. Approval of the December and February Minutes

Regarding the December minutes, Mr. Drudi asked that specific community member names be used. **Earl Franks and John Craig will be added to the minutes.**

Regarding the February minutes, Mr. Drudi and Mr. Craig (from the February meeting) are still concerned that infrastructure improvements at Braddock Road are not being done. **Mr. Hill asked that the February minutes be amended to generally state that there was discussion of the Braddock Road project and that additional discussion can occur in the future.**

The meeting minutes from the December 2022 and February 2023 meetings were approved unanimously with above-mentioned edits.

3. Update on Flood Action Program (City Staff)

Dr. Medina provided updates for **Large Capacity Projects.**

- a. The master schedule was just recently updated and republished. Ms. Waynick indicated that the Flood Action Project Dashboard (Dashboard) information is lagging or conflicting with recent City timelines released. **The City will work to update the Dashboard with the latest information, along with amendments to projects that could extend timelines (for instance added work for 00 E. Linden).**
- b. Commonwealth/ E. Glebe & Commonwealth & Ashby (\$50M): This project is under design. Survey will be completed end of March 2023. Staff noted that this project consists of the top two prioritized large capacity projects, so that this is the first two large capacity projects that are underway.



- c. Hooffs Run Culvert Bypass (\$60M) design contract was signed by the contractor and is being processed by the City. The City anticipates design starting within the next couple of weeks. Staff noted that this is the third large capacity project underway.
- d. Ms. Thuot asked when information about options for projects would be shared with the public. The City indicated that information about options is shared through public outreach meetings and via the City website.
- e. Ms. Waynick asked if the City could add some of the larger maintenance and DPW initiatives to the Dashboard. Mr. Hill indicated communication and driving public engagement will be a major topic of discussion at the June meeting. **The Ad Hoc Group will discuss in more detail then.**

Dr. Medina provided updates for **Combined Sewer System (CSS) Projects.**

- a. Pitt & Gibbon (\$11.5M) is in the planning phase. The City and design consultant are reviewing additional alternatives since the originals appear to conflict with Alex Renew infrastructure. The City just met with Alex Renew to find an alternative that reduces conflicts. Ms. Thuot indicated that the latest master schedule shows a 9-month delay in planning. Dr. Medina and Ms. Suehr indicated that the City needs additional time to revise concepts identified so far, which have been found to be infeasible as originally presented. None of the options have been ruled out due to cost. Per Ms. Suehr, this project is a high priority for the City and the City has engaged multiple groups to help find a feasible concept. Once a feasible concept is identified, the City can share information with the public.
- b. Nethergate (\$5M) is in the planning phase. The City is reviewing the Alternatives Analysis and will select an alternative for further design.

Mr. Dillon provided updates for **Spot Improvement Projects.**

- a. No new spot improvement projects have been added since the last meeting. Projects expedited are the same as last meeting. Suspended projects are the same as last meeting. Projects contingent on Hooffs Run Culvert Bypass construction are the same as last meeting. **See slides for general status of projects and major milestones achieved.**
- b. Oakland Terrace Timber Branch: this small stream stabilization project could not be fulfilled through an on-call contract, so it will be issued through a publicly advertised Invitation to Bid (ITB). This change adds approximately 6 months to the project schedule. Mr. Maginniss asked how many on-call contractors the City has. The City currently has two main on-call contractors, but neither could provide these particular services at this time.
- c. Mr. Drudi asked why the N. Columbus St. Alley is being delayed. He indicated flooding here has an impact on a major arterial due to overflow from the alley. Mr. Maines clarified that flooding does not overflow to Washington St. **Mr. Dillon will get clarification on the delay from the City project manager.**
 - a. N. Columbus Alley is a legacy project with complaints of ponding in the paved alley dating back to 2008. The alley is flat in the middle. Both ends are about a foot lower which results in poor drainage . Reported impacts to private property include damage to a garage structure and fencing. There are no recent reports of in-home flooding, basement back-ups or vehicular damage. Ownership of the alleyway is fractured and in some instances dates back 200 years. Fractured ownership makes holistic resolutions difficult as the City cannot make



improvements on private property with public funds. Furthermore, this project is in the combined sewer area and storm infrastructure is not close. The result of these conditions is that any public stormwater infrastructure will require an easement obtained through extensive community outreach and property investigation. Connecting the alley to the combined sewer is extremely difficult as the connection point is distant. The nearest combined pipe is 6" diameter pipe under Pendleton and the pipe is in poor condition. The City has considered attempting to store and infiltrate the ponded water; however, this option is expensive and permitting is complex. The City re-graded the alley in 2021 to improve drainage. The results were partially successful, and the City is monitoring flood reports to determine if additional investment is needed. N. Columbus was previously anticipated to begin design in March; however, the updated schedule for Q1 2023 estimates that design will begin in May. Given the challenges above, at this point it is not possible to forecast future work. Given that the negative impacts of flooding in this area have been limited, the City will move this project to a lesser priority until evidence to the contrary becomes available.

- d. Mount Vernon Cul-de-Sac Inlets and Alley: An unexpected Washington Gas pipe was found, which is causing delay. Councilman Chapman asked if this issue should be elevated to Washington Gas leadership to encourage better records of utilities. Mr. Dillon indicated finding utilities like this is not atypical in an old city, and therefore does not warrant elevation of the issue. Mr. Rahal indicated the City is doing additional utility test pitting to better locate the gas line. Ms. Waynick asked whether the additional cost of test pitting and relocating the gas line will be paid for by the City or Washington Gas. The City indicated the cost would be paid by the City since the City is doing the work that impacts the gas line.
- e. 100 Hume Ave. Storm Drain Bypass Design: One of multiple objectives of this project is to address backyard flooding along Hume Ave. Through design, the City has found that in order to address backyard flooding, the scope of the project must be expanded to E. Raymond Ave. As a result, the City is undergoing an additional alternatives assessment that was not initially anticipated, so the schedule is being extended. The City is currently reviewing the 30% designs (schematic level designs) and will present them to the community after refinement. "30%" indicates how advanced the design is. Design submissions are typically done when designs are 30%, 60%, 90% and 100% complete. The City is also coordinating this project with the Commonwealth/Ashby/Glebe project.
- f. Mount Vernon and Edison Dual CMP Replacement: the City anticipates providing notice to proceed to design next month.

Mr. Maines provided an update on major **Targeted Maintenance Initiatives**.

- a. The City is removing nuisance vegetation in the bottom of the Holmes Run Channel to create more capacity by end of May in accordance with the 2022 plan vetted by the City's Environmental Policy Commission.
- b. Hatches and a retaining wall are being repaired on the lower Hooffs Run Culvert. The City will do another inspection in the lower culvert to see if it needs to be cleaned (E. Maple St. to Duke St.). Mr.



Drudi asked if the retaining wall is underground. Mr. Maines indicated that it is above ground in Blue Park. Mr. Rahal indicated the current retaining wall is wooden and rotting.

4. Overview of Proposed Stormwater Budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024

Councilman Chapman indicated that the Council is still reviewing the annual budget and will make final approvals in May. Mr. Hill gave testimony to Council regarding the Stormwater Fee increase, indicating that the City is on the right track with Flood Action work so far, but there is significant work remaining. Councilman Chapman indicated that no one on Council has expressed concern to him so far regarding the Stormwater Fee increase. Ms. Thuot and Ms. Waynick have also provided letters to Council describing flooding concerns and perspectives from community members, showing a need for continued funding of flood mitigation projects.

5. Discussion of “Summary Statement” to accompany the Annual Report

A draft of the Ad Hoc Group Annual Report has been developed and distributed to the Ad Hoc Group for review and comment. Mr. Hill asked the Ad Hoc Group for input on a number of questions, and **will update the report to reflect the following input:**

- 1) Is the CIP funding directed to the right places?
 - Per Mr. Hill, largely yes, but as residents like Mr. Craig have pointed out in prior meetings, some mitigation needs may have been previously overlooked. Mr. Drudi suggested that mitigation efforts at Braddock Rd. be added as a priority. Mr. Rahal indicated that the City has engaged an engineer through the City’s on-call contract to further analyze alternatives, cost analysis, and modeling for Braddock Rd. Funding for Braddock Rd. design was allocated in FY2023 (\$200k). Construction funding is not allocated yet. **The Ad Hoc Group will recommend allocating construction funding in the CIP.** The Ad Hoc Group indicated this project is an example of how the Ad Hoc Group has provided a mechanism for residents to bring lesser-known needs to the City’s attention.
- 2) Is funding sufficient to solve flooding?
 - The Ad Hoc Group provided nuance to the question. Mr. Drudi indicated no, but that rate increases also need to be measured. Ms. Waynick indicated problems will never be fully solved and the question should be whether the CIP is mitigating flooding risk. Mr. Maginniss and Mr. Sands indicated the Ad Hoc Group does not have enough information given design is not advanced enough and inflation and storms may evolve over time.
 - The Ad Hoc Group discussed that the question could be written more specifically as: Does the 10-year CIP funding cover the initial round of flood mitigation projects (~12 Stormwater and combined sewer projects)?
 - The Ad Hoc Group discussed the potential for extreme weather events in the future. The National Weather Service (NWS) estimates a 30%-50% increase in these types of events by the end of the century. Dr. Medina also indicated that the design of these projects will not address all flooding – they address the 10-year storm, but larger storms may still result in flooding. Mr. Maginniss mentioned a recent presentation about a German locality (Hanover), which emphasized that projects can mitigate only a certain amount of flooding. The community needs to learn to live with water and understand that some



flooding does not necessarily mean a failure by the City. The community must also maintain and protect their own properties in conjunction with City efforts. Ms. Waynick indicated that there is a disparity in the level of flooding among residents, and communication can highlight these differences so expectations for City projects and associated funding are nuanced and informed. Ms. Suehr indicated that certain areas may be intentionally allowed to flood (such as in a park) given limited space in the City.

- 3) Is the Flood Mitigation Grant Program (Grant Program) adequately funded?
 - The Ad Hoc Group generally believes the answer is no, however the Ad Hoc Group indicated additional data regarding the program (number of applicants, total funds distributed vs. total spent by owners) would be helpful to further inform recommendations for funding levels and caps, particularly to multi-family buildings. The Ad Hoc Group would like to focus strongly on collecting mitigation costs for multi-family buildings, developing a multi-family formula for caps, and generally expanding the Grant Program. The Grant Program is available to all property types. **The City is revisiting the approach for multi-family caps since the previously presented formulas provided widely varying and inequitable results and brought this information to the Ad Hoc to discuss the formulae at the last meeting.** At that time, the Ad Hoc asked staff to continue working on the approach. Ms. Thuot asked whether the City is considering raising the cap overall since there was excess of funding in the first year that is rolling over. Mr. Maines indicated no, the goal is to expand the program to properties that have not yet flooded and address the multi-family building approach before raising the overall cap.
- 4) Is the City making sufficient progress?
 - Mr. Hill indicated the spot improvement projects and community outreach efforts are moving forward well.
 - Ms. Shew asked what progress is being measured against. Mr. Hill indicated to look at the Gantt chart in the draft Ad Hoc Group Annual report. Mr. Drudi indicated the progress in expanding the cap of the Flood Mitigation Grant Program for multi-family buildings has not been sufficient. Mr. Maginniss asked whether the Stormwater Fee funds the Grant Program. Mr. Maines indicated yes, and if further funds are diverted to the Grant program, less funds are available for capital improvement projects.
 - The Ad Hoc Group wants the large capacity projects to move forward more quickly, however recognize that design takes significant time and that the City and Council have done more in the past 2 years than in the past decade. Mr. Sands indicated that it takes time to do things right (planning, funding, prioritization, and design), so it is difficult to say that the City is moving too slowly.
 - Ms. Shew indicated that more data needs to be collected to evaluate and measure progress.
 - Ms. Waynick would like the report to acknowledge progress to date and point out areas for future work.
 - Ms. Shew indicated that the Ad Hoc Group adds value by bringing resident opinions and local insights to the City, and by dissecting City information and bringing it to residents so they can be much more informed on the nuance of flooding issues and design.



- Mr. Drudi indicated that progress is hard to define given the steep learning curve with the launch of the Flood Action initiative. A significant portion of the progress made is in the City, Ad Hoc Group, and residents all learning about flood mitigation needs and better understanding and establishing the processes for mitigating (“Civic Learning Curve”). For example, the City realized capital improvements, maintenance, and a dedicated stormwater program manager are pivotal. The Ad Hoc Group also provides value to the City as a facilitator and important conduit with the community as the Flood Action program becomes further established.
 - Mr. Sands indicated that progress is occurring, even if the community would like it to move faster.
- 5) Mr. Drudi would like the report to include detail about what the Ad Hoc Group has done for the past year to help justify its continuance. Ms. Waynick asked Councilman Chapman whether the Group should request renewal and permanency of the Group in the report. Councilman Chapman indicated yes, with a description of what the Ad Hoc Group will do in the future. Ms. Thuot asked if there is a notification deadline. **Councilman Chapman indicated there is a timeline and will follow up with additional information.**
- 6) **The Ad Hoc Group directed Mr. Hill to develop a 1.5 page summary which includes the notes taken during this meeting. He will circulate the draft for final approval.**

6. Public Comment

- a. Rose Esber: Ms. Esber lives in an 8-unit condominium at 1707 King St. The building and a nearby hotel are located at the downstream end of the Hooffs Run Culvert near the King St Metro Station. The condominium building has flooded 5 times, including flooding of the parking garage and elevators. The building has spent nearly \$300k for a commercial floodgate, which required a special assessment and puts significant financial burden on owners. Ms. Esber asked which of the Flood Action projects will mitigate flooding in her building and when. Ms. Esber requested images and clear communication to show how the City is working to mitigate flooding. The City indicated that the Hooffs Run Culvert Bypass project is going to reduce flooding in Ms. Esber’s area.
- The Ad Hoc Group and Ms. Esber indicated that the benefits of projects on the Dashboard are not clear. For instance, the Hooffs Run Culvert Bypass project has just one dot on the map, even though the benefits and project impact a broader area. The Ad Hoc Group recommended strong public outreach for the Hooffs Run project at 30% design. Ms. Thuot recommended that the Dashboard show impact/inundation mapping on the Flood Action Project Dashboard. **Mr. Dillon indicated this could be done for certain larger projects once sufficient modeling and project information is obtained.**
 - The Ad Hoc Group emphasized easy and clear communication with the community. As an example, Ms. Waynick indicated the Alex Renew children’s book about Hazel the Tunnel Boring Machine is super effective.
 - Ms. Esber asked that the City expand the Flood Mitigation Grant Program cap during the 5-10 years it will take to complete the Hooffs Run project. Mr. Drudi explained his suggested multi-family formula cap. **Mr. Maines and a number of Ad Hoc Group members indicated that the proposed formulas presented in the February meeting**



require refinement through an equity lens and are being further considered by the City. Ms. Leonard lives in a multi-family building.

- Ms. Esber and the Ad Hoc Group discussed the impacts of flooding on hotels and businesses near King St. There are major impacts to tourism and business when the buildings flood. The City also found that the flood barrier installed by the hotel did not deploy properly since a car was parked on top of it. The barrier is now well marked to prevent this in the future, and is a good lesson learned moving forward.
- b. Jim Burkhart: Regarding the 00 E. Linden project, the Dashboard shows the project is complete, but Mr. Burkhart asked what the scope of completed work was, and how “complete” is defined. Private properties in the project area are lower than the public right of way still, so flood mitigation is still needed. Mr. Rahal indicated the City have planned two things in the alley and parking lot. A trench drain has been installed and seems effective so far. The second scope item is installation of a drain with backflow preventer near the walkway of the first unit to provide a drain connection for patios and low-lying property. The City’s Public Works Department is doing the upgrade and is waiting on construction material, so this part of the scope is not yet complete. **Mr. Burkhart asked for an update via email.** Once the work is complete, residents can use the Grant Program to apply for funding for drainage connections to this new pipe. The City indicated that E. Linden has two projects that are very close by and **will update the Dashboard to make sure the status of the projects are clearer.**
- c. Reuben Anderson: Mr. Anderson asked how much extra flood capacity the 3 large capacity projects are going to give the City in gallons to the sewer system. He also asked what type of flooding the projects address? Mr. Anderson is concerned that his building is about to do a multi-million dollar foundation repair when flooding risks are still present. Dr. Medina indicated that surface and storm sewer pipe flooding will be mitigation by the large capacity projects. The level of mitigation depends on where a building is located along the Hooffs Run Culvert Bypass alignment. Groundwater intrusion into basements will not be mitigated through the Hooffs Run Culvert Bypass project, but the project should not negatively impact the basement foundation.
- d. Steve Etkka: Mr. Etkka lives on the corner of Hancock Avenue and West Luray. For the past few years, during heavy rain events each summer, his home has experienced sewage backup in the basement. He has taken multiple steps to mitigate the issue, including a backflow check valve, which is always active, and a secondary metal cutoff gate that he lowers ahead of storm events. While these measures have reduced the problem, he continues to have some sewage backup in his basement floor drain each summer. He has contacted the City multiple times, including Suzanne Salva (Aug 16, 2022), and performed a smoke test. The smoke test (April 12, 2022) found no other potential sewage conduits into the house that would explain why there is still sewage backup. The City staff person who conducted the smoke test was Carl Long. Mr. Etkka asked if the Ad Hoc Group and City are addressing issues related to sewage backup into citizens’ basements during big storm events, particularly in his neighborhood. **Ms. Bevis-Carver will set up a meeting to discuss further next week.** Mr. Hill asked how far Mr. Etkka’s home is away from Commonwealth Ave. Mr. Hill indicated that Alex Renew is looking to expand the Commonwealth Interceptor within the next 4-6 years, which could potentially help. Mr. Hill encouraged Mr. Etkka to review the project information online. Mr. Etkka asked whether the River Renew project near the waterfront will exacerbate flooding issues upstream. Mr. Hill indicated no. Mr. Drudi indicated that the combined sewage and stormwater that was going into the Potomac River will instead go into a 12-diameter pipe to the Alex Renew



Treatment Plant. Ms. Waynick indicated that parts of Commonwealth Ave. will not see sewer backup benefits from the Commonwealth Interceptor project if they are located upstream of the interceptor's pump station.

- e. Elizabeth Gabrosek: Ms. Gabrosek is the Auburn Village Condo Board President. Her community is making significant foundation repairs and investments related to waterproofing, which is a serious burden on owners. She seconded the request to continue to review the Grant Program cap for multi-family units.
- f. Tom Polanic: Mr. Polanic thanked Mr. Burkhardt for discussing the E. Linden projects.

7. Adjourn

Meeting Adjourned at 8:36pm by unanimous vote.