

MINUTES OF THE LITTLE CALUMET RIVER BASIN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

HELD AT 6:00p.m., WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 2018

Location: MUNSTER TOWN HALL, Munster, IN

Chairman Baker called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Pledge of Allegiance was recited. An Executive Session/Work Study Session was held prior to the public meeting. There were eight (8) Commission members present at roll call. Quorum was declared.

Commissioners:

William Baker, Chairman
Tom Wichlinski, Vice-Chairman
Dave Castellanos
Tom Gozdecki
Derek Nimetz
Levon Whittaker
Ron Ware
Anthony Broadnax

Executive Director:

Dan Repay

Attorney:

Dave Wickland

Staff:

Jodi Lambert

Visitors:

Laurie Czulno – Hammond
Natalie Mills – USACE
Bill Rochford – USACE
Col. Reisinger - USACE
David Nellans – Munster Town Council
Chris Spolnik – Town of Munster
John Beckman – IWLA – PCC
Steve Truchan – Gary Bridge & Iron
Katie Kurley – Steel City Academy
Brianna Marshall – Steel City Academy
Adreinne Askew – Steel City Academy
Charlie Svitko – Munster
David Toftoy – Finer Finish Grounds Care
Barbara Whitaker – Munster
Mark Gordish – City of Hammond
Brenda Atkins – Steel City Academy
Sam Henderson – Hoosier Env. Council
Lauren Cross – The Times
James Dedelow – Munster
John Mulesa – Munster

Approval of Minutes -

Commissioner Nimetz made a motion to approve the minutes as presented; motion seconded by Commissioner Castellanos; motion passed with 8 aye votes.

Chairman's Report –

Chairman Baker welcomed all to the meeting and thanked them for attending. The Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission is the local partner in a federal flood control project. It has been 10 years since the devastating flood event of 2008. The yellowing pictures we show at every meeting serve as a reminder of what can happen if maintenance on a man-made flood control project is neglected. The Commission is tasked with the ongoing and deferred maintenance of this \$275 million man-made flood project and we are far better prepared now than we have been in the past. We saw from the rain event last month what can happen when dealing with Mother Nature. Keep in mind that 10 gallons of water in a 5 gallon bucket will cause problems. The Commission continues the practice of meeting with the communities in the Watershed on a monthly basis to ensure we are ready in case of a flood event. The goal of this Commission is a true regional flood project.

Finance –

Chairman Baker referred to the March claims in the amount of \$258,414.61. Commissioner Castellanos made a motion to approve the claims as presented; motion seconded by Commissioner Whittaker. Chairman Baker asked if there were any questions and called for a roll call vote. Motion passed 8-0.

Executive Director's Report –

Mr. Repay gave updates on some of the projects:

- The G&W/CF&E Railroad Bridge Project is in the permitting phase. A contract was awarded to cut and clear trees to Industrial Railroad Services. The tree clearing was initially to be part of the contract award, but it will now be a separate contract due to the Indiana Bat tree clearing restrictions. We are still waiting on the Historical Preservation Permit after which the project should be ready to bid out.
- The Hobart Mitigation Project is ongoing. The project is in a slow period, but should pick up pace once everything dries out.
- The In Project Mitigation has been awarded. The contractor has not started on the project yet due to weather conditions.
- Clean-up is being done in response to the high water a few weeks ago. We have started cleaning up in various areas near bridges and culverts now that the water has receded some.
- We are partnering with Autobahn of Chicago and the Wetland Initiative on some projects, including areas near Cline Avenue and between Martin Luther King Drive and Georgia Street.
- Geotechnical work was completed on the Chase Street Pedestrian Bridge Project. The preliminary plans are ready to submit to the USACE for their approval.
- The engineering is completed for the Clark Road Grade Modification Project. The plans will be submitted to the USACE for their approval. This will be similar to the Georgia Street Grade Adjustment Project completed previously.
- The 35th & Chase Grade Adjustment Project is moving forward with the contract awarded to Dyer Construction. They received their Authorization to Begin and we should received a schedule from them soon.
- The Harrison Avenue Bridge Project is under design and in the permitting phase. This project will eliminate another closure within the City of Gary.
- The Kennedy Avenue Bridge Project is also under design phase with anticipated bid in late summer.

Chairman Baker stated that the way the system is designed, numerous road closures are necessary that require sandbags and man power. The Commission is spending dollars to eliminate as many of these closures that we can.

Commissioner Wichlinski asked the anticipated finish date of the tree clearing for the G&WCF&E Railroad Bridge Project. Mr. Repay stated that the contractor needs to be completed by April 1st to comply with the Indiana Bat restrictions.

Mr. Repay added that several new gauges have come online in the system. These new gauges will help us understand the flow and if there are any blockages.

Presentation -

Mr. Repay gave a presentation on the high water event that occurred in February. He presented a timeline of the events and the actions by us and local communities. Mr. Repay stated that he was pleased by the response of the local communities and our federal partners, everyone followed the plan and did what they were supposed to do. He also added that we were able to assist the county near the Kankakee River with sandbags and sandbag machines. A complete audio & corresponding power point slides of the presentation can be found on our website at www.littlecalumetriverbasin.org.

Commissioner Castellanos stated that he was impressed by the First Responders and the efforts made by them in keeping everyone safe.

Commissioner Broadnax added that this system designed by the USACE takes into account certain design conditions. However, it is very unlikely that the design conditions would include 2 feet of snow, frozen ground and a large volume of rain. The Commission meet to discuss what worked well and what we can do better on. We are committed to doing the best that we can for the communities to provide flood protection.

Update from the USACE -

Natalie Mills from the USACE stated that the system worked well and the communities stepped up and did what they were supposed to do in an event such as this. She introduced Bill Rochford, Levee Safety Program Manager to answer several questions that were presented to the USACE.

Question 1 – We would like a general overview of why the water stacks up and stores in Gary, the roads need to be closed longer and the pressure on the levees in Gary last longer.

As explained by Mr. Rochford, once the water moves towards Gary, the levees are set back allowing the water to spread out and store. The Gary area is a former marsh and acts as a sponge to fill-up and slowly allow the water to drain away. Mr. Rochford also stated that all roads within the levee system are either high enough or designed to be closed during high water events.

Question 2 – What are the next steps to deal with the 600 feet of wall that was leaking in Munster during the rain event?

Mr. Rochford stated that the leakage observed was more that allowed for by design. The USACE issued a 30 day notice to all levee sponsors to identify any performance issues or damages due to the recent flooding event. If the project is maintained and operated according the project O&M manuals, the federal government will complete and repairs necessary.

Question 3 - There was a lot of pressure on Hart Ditch, which exceeded its historic high water mark, yet no water overtopped into Wicker Park or the Highland Rookery.

Mr. Rochford stated that both Wicker Park and the Highland Rookery are overtopping areas. After reviewing the gauge levels, it was determined that, during the rain event, the water did not reach a level high enough to have water begin to fill up those two areas. There is a low part of the levee on the Wicker Park side to direct water into the park if necessary, before it overtops on the opposite side.

Question 4 – It appears that the Hart Ditch Levee is higher on the Wicker Park side then on the Hawthorne Drive side.

The Hawthorne Drive side of the levee is a concrete flood while the Wicker Park side is an earthen levee. The earthen levees have overbuild to accommodate for settling as well as 6 inches of top soil. Mr. Rochford also stated again that there is a low portion of the levee on the Wicker Park side to direct water into the park.

Question 5 – Based on the field team observations, is there something the Commission or communities could have done better?

The Commission and the communities did a great job implementing the plan and the levees afforded a lot of protection. In certain areas, the levels were as high as in 2008. Officials need to make sure they continue to check the levees and follow the flood plan.

Colonel Reisinger stated that he was pleased with how the system performed. Of course, there are always things to work on, and the USACE will take the notes and information from the event and work on solutions.

Natalie Mills updated the status of the Hammond LOMR. According to FEMA, the LOMR would be issued within the next 45-60 days. However, the LOMR will not be effective until after the appeal period. She will follow-up with FEMA to narrow down the effective date.

The In-Project Mitigation is scheduled to begin next week. They will begin with the removal of trees and shrubs.

The Hobart Marsh Mitigation Project continues to make progress. The contractor is continuing with fencing and seeding work at the present time. A community meeting was held on March 1st to answer questions from the public about the project.

Other Issues/New Business –

Commissioner Broadnax made a motion to authorize the Executive Director to open bids for Periodic Levee Mowing and award to the lowest and most responsive bidder, pending review by attorney and staff; motion seconded by Commissioner Nimetz. Mr. Repay stated that there are over twenty miles of levee that needs to be mowed approximately 4-5 cycles per season. Chairman Baker asked if there were any questions and called for a roll call vote. Motion passed 8-0. The bids received were as follows: C&H Mowing - \$23,300.00; and Finer Finish Grounds Care - \$20,400.00.

Statements from the Floor –

Barbara Whitaker, Munster, states that she believes the levee is higher on the Golf Course side than on the side by the residences. She further stated that the levee on Golf Course side isn't going to settle and the next time we have a high water event, the water is going to come into the houses. She also added that the sandbagging done by the town along Hart Ditch was a total waste of time and money.

Laurie Czulno, Hammond, stated that February's rain event was quite a test of our system. She asked if the stop logs at the State Line Tie-Back needed to be reinforced. The USACE stated that the stop logs are sufficient and additional reinforcement is not necessary. She also asked about the trigger point when additional sand bags would be needed to at the State Line Tie-back site and who makes the determination. Mr. Repay stated that the City of Hammond is aware and would follow the plan as laid out in the O&M Manual.

John Beckman, Hammond, expressed his appreciation to Dan Repay regarding his continued discussions with Craig Zandstra of Lake County Parks regarding future wetland projects.

Adrienne Askew, Steel City Academy, spoke on behalf of the 240 students at the school as well as the 30 students present at the meeting. Ms. Askew asked that the LCRBDC help their school by not leasing land to Maya Energy. The school is on 18 acres of natural land that enhances the education of the students. The land will become a dump if leased to Maya Energy with the trash piles higher than the trees and animals will be pushed from their natural habitats. Please choose their education and health of the lease agreement. Ms. Askew further noted Steel City's 5 core values of Purpose, Grit, Team, Joy and Power.

Brianna Marshall, Steel City Academy, spoke against leasing land to Maya Energy. At school they use the phrase "Steel City Strong" to represent their pride in their home of Gary. The LCRBDC exists to protect

the area from flooding. The students of Steel City Academy ask that you not take away land meant for flood protection. The land currently soaks up excess water that occurs during heavy rains. Please consider how this would affect the student health and learning with a dump nearby. This is environmental injustice within the City of Gary. Ms. Marshall asked that you protect their right to learn in a healthy environment.

Katie Kurley, Principal and Co-Founder of Steel City Academy, spoke representing the 280 students and families of Steel City Academy. She requested that LCRBDC reconsider the license agreement with Maya Energy as they plan to build a solid waste processing facility 96.4 feet away from the school. The school is located on 18 acres of land that backs up to the Little Calumet River. The land and trails are used daily by the students as part of their education. Since becoming aware of the project, the school has hosted a Community meeting and sat in silent protest at the Gary City Council Meeting. Please reconsider placing the Maya Energy project on a location immediately adjacent to a flood plain. Finally the increased truck traffic along 35th Street would create an unsafe environment for students, parents and teachers.

Brenda Atkins, Steel City Academy Parent, stated that her daughter has asthma and she is concerned with the health problems that could occur with Maya Energy located so close to her school. The Maya Energy project is not safe located near a school. The amount of truck traffic would be detriment to the student's learning. Ms. Atkins is also concerned about the amount of school time kids would miss because they are sick.

John Mulesa, Munster, questioned why the Northcote Bridge was closed during the past rain event. Mr. Repay stated that the siphon bridge was never part of the federal project and because of that, still needs a closure structure. Mr. Mulesa also stated that he observed a 1 foot difference in the water height on either side of the bridge.

Steve Truchan, Gary Bridge & Iron, spoke in opposition to Maya Energy. The street cannot handle the additional truck traffic that the project would bring. Maya Energy would pave 35 acres of land and during high rain events there would be nowhere for the water to go. The City of Gary was not presented with all the facts when they approved the zoning. He feels that the incorrect address was given by Maya when requesting zoning and permits. Mr. Truchan encourages the LCRBDC to reconsider the license agreement with Maya Energy.

Commissioner Castellanos complimented the young people from Steel City Academy on their words to the Commission, they did a great job. He also thanked the USACE on their presentation and invited them to attend one of the WLTH broadcasts in the near future to explain to the residents how the flood control project is deigned to work.

Commissioner Nimetz stated that he was impressed by the progress that has occurred since 2008. He thanked the presenters for the opportunity to learn more about the flood control project at tonight's meeting.

Commissioner Broadnax stated he was impressed by the students that spoke tonight and admired their passion. They were good representatives of their school and the City of Gary.

Commissioner Gozdecki stated that the students and community leaders did an outstanding job in sharing their thoughts with the Commission.

Chairman Baker gave kudos to the students of Steel City Academy for sharing their thoughts tonight. He also thanked Mr. Repay and the communities for their tireless efforts during the past rain event.

Commissioner Wichlinski thanked the student for their statement to the board this evening. He also stated that Mr. Repay, the local communities and partners did a great job during this past event.

Commissioner Whittaker said he was glad to see so many new faces at the meeting tonight. He encouraged the students to stay involved and stay motivated. The past flood event was a good test to see whether we could put into place the flood plan. The O&M Manuals for the different communities will be available on our website so that everyone can see what the plan entails.

Commissioner Ware encouraged the students to keep up the advocacy, this is what drives change. He also thanked Mr. Repay and all the communities for their hard work during the February rain event.

There being no further business, the next meeting was scheduled for 6:00 p.m. Wednesday, April 11th, at the Munster Town Hall.