

BUFFALO-RED RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

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BUFFALO-RED RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT PROJECT NO. 39, GEORGETOWN FLOOD CONTROL INFORMATIONAL MEETING MINUTES August 11, 2011

The Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD), held an informational meeting on Thursday, August 11, 2011, at 8:00 PM in the Georgetown Community Center, Georgetown, MN. BRRWD Managers present were Gerald L. Van Amburg, Curtis M. Nelson, John E. Hanson, and Breanna L. Paradeis Kobiela. Others attending included Bruce E. Albright, BRRWD Administrator, Gabe Bladow, Engineer, and Rick St. Germain, Engineer, Houston Engineering, Inc. (HEI); Traci Goble, Mayor, and Don and Cindy Culp, City Council, City of Georgetown; Alexandra Miller, Lake Agassiz Habitat for Humanity Restore; John Shockley, Attorney, Ohnstad Twichell; and landowners: Lester and Joan Sorenson, Larry Pollock, Dawn Lemke, Jennifer Stordahl, Jim Myers, Greta Myers, L.D. Nelson, Jeffery Engstrom, Daniel Engstrom, Makayla Wambach, Nick Wambach, Dorene Wambach, Kevin Hass, Betty Sorenson, Trevor Sorenson, Karen Clark, Tonya Kramer, Marc Kramer, Keith Tschetter, Shane Hulbert, Monique Jenson, Craig Morton, Adam Carson, Janet Carson, Rosalie Goble, Pam Pederson, Michael Greywind, David Wambach, Allen Wambach, Gordon Nygard, Barb Cote, David Cote, and Michael Wietzema.

BRRWD Administrator Bruce Albright called the meeting to order at 8:00 PM. He passed an attendance signup sheet and asked the landowners to state their name for the record when giving testimony or asking a question. He noted that the meeting was being recorded to aid in the preparation of minutes. Albright explained this meeting was being held to discuss flood control improvement for the City of Georgetown. He gave a history on the repetitive flooding in Georgetown. After the flood in 1997, the BRRWD secured funding to construct a levee around Georgetown. The levee was built to the 1997 flood elevation since only limited funding was available. There was subsequent flooding in the following years that proved the levee successful. However, the 2009 flood was even bigger than the 1997 flood in Georgetown, and the Army Corps of Engineers (COE) had to raise the levee to protect the city. Afterwards, there was significant cleanup to be completed. With the 2011 flood, the COE had to assist the City of Georgetown once again by raising the levee. The BRRWD began collaborating with the City after the 2009 flood to improve their permanent protection.

Albright explained that a \$100,000 State of Minnesota grant for project development is almost depleted. He stated that a \$500,000 grant was recently secured and will be available through 12/31/12. Albright also noted that the State Legislature has approved \$3 million in the 2011 Bonding Bill, specifically reserved for the City of Georgetown Flood Control Project.

St. Germain stated that 15 out of 39 home appraisals have been completed. He noted the appraisal values are averaging approximately 20% higher than the estimated market value which is double what was budgeted in the preliminary Opinion of Probable Costs. St. Germain informed the group the total project costs could be closer to \$4.25 million. The reasons for the increase include the higher appraisals and increased construction costs. He also noted that the updated cost estimate includes \$250,000 for contingencies.

St. Germain discussed the tentative project development schedule. He explained the BRRWD would tentatively finish obtaining the easement agreements in October 2011. Then, we could hold the final hearing in October. This hearing will determine if the consensus is to move forward with the project. If the project is approved, HEI would complete the final project design between October 2011 and January 2012. St. Germain said the BRRWD Board could potentially open bids in February, with construction beginning in June 2012. The expected project completion would be in October 2012.

A landowner questioned if the \$1.4 million for buyouts included the demolition expenses of these structures as well. St. Germain explained the buyout includes the property and structures but not the demolition. He said the demolition expenses have been budgeted separately at an approximate amount of \$200,000.

Albright discussed some of the project features. The alignment of the new dike will be similar to the old levee with a slight modification. Currently, there are areas along the old levee which are caving into the Buffalo River. He stated the new levee would be set back slightly from the riverbank. St. Germain explained that HEI performed a slope stability analysis to assist in the preliminary project design. The new levee is designed as close to the riverbank as possible but also designed to minimize stability issues. Albright stated the new levee is 4' above base flood elevation. This allows for 3' of protection plus 1' of settling. Albright asked St. Germain about the height difference of the new levee versus the old levee prior to the COE's modifications. St. Germain said the new levee is approximately 4' higher.

Albright detailed the alignment of the new levee and mentioned the location of some property buyouts. St. Germain noted that there needs to be enough storage inside the levee to ensure that the City of Georgetown does not flood internally. He noted there will also be functioning pumps. He stated these two features will allow the city to withstand a significant rain event. Albright added there will be ponds strategically placed inside the levee to alleviate storm water and drainage issues. The soil removed during the pond construction can then be used to build the levee. Albright noted the project does not include funding for any major road closures, therefore, Trunk Highway (T.H.) No. 75 and County Road (C.R.) No. 34 would be temporary closures only.

Attorney John Shockley asked what type of decision-making guidance the BRRWD Board would need. Albright stated one area of guidance would be where the project could be scaled back at this time since the total funding for the current design has not yet been secured. Albright stated that prior to the meeting he had briefly discussed the pumping stations with St. Germain. St. Germain explained that three pumping stations have been incorporated into the project. The cost of each station is approximately \$150,000. He explained that to operate the pumps, a tractor would need to be connected via the power take-off. Once the pumps are running, water could be pumped out of the levee fairly quickly. St. Germain explained the pumps are a nice feature to incorporate, but they are relatively expensive.

A landowner asked if it would be possible to bring the pumps in if needed during a flood. St. Germain said it was a possibility, however, this would require more work and maintenance. He noted a thorough evaluation of possible expense reductions has not been completed, but the pumps are a possible area to cut costs. He explained adjusting the height of the levee is also an option, but this does not provide a substantial savings. Albright explained that we have to use the information available today to decide what can be constructed using the \$3.5 million that has been secured. The goal is to provide protection for the largest majority and buyout those that cannot be protected. He stated we do not want to move forward without a thorough plan which could consume the secured funds. This could result in an incomplete project that does not provide enough protection for the City.

Albright asked BRRWD Manager Van Amburg if the Board had any further concerns for which they wanted landowner feedback. He said the State is cautious when considering expanded protection areas inside a dike. For example, the State might allow the dike to be moved out an additional 0.5 miles, but they will not pay for it. Albright noted that a dike really limits the potential growth of the City because most likely nothing will be built outside the dike.

Landowner Kevin Haas asked if the State would fund the re-alignment of a 1,000' section of the dike, if it meant there would be more land within the dike. Albright explained that if the BRRWD took the 1,000' of the dike adjacent to the roadway and re-aligned it to increase the area within the dike, the State would not fund the re-alignment.

Albright mentioned there would be certain landowners who will have different options to consider. For example, there are some lots where the dike cuts through only the corner of their lot, but the house is not affected. For others, the dike would cut directly through the middle of their properties. Some homeowners may be able to stay on their lot, but the house will need to be relocated on the lot, or it could be possible for someone outside the dike to move their home inside the dike on an empty lot. Albright explained the State would approve of the most economical option if there were alternatives to consider. Engineer Gabe Bladow will be the direct contact for the landowners throughout the project.

Albright explained the process that would be followed for buyouts. The abstract would be sent to Vogel Law Firm. Then, Attorney Corey Elmer would prepare the purchase agreement which would include any minor details, as well as the closing date. Albright noted adjustments can be made later through amendments if needed. The homeowner can begin searching for a new home once they have their purchase agreement in hand.

Van Amburg commented that the BRRWD Board knows the alignment of the dike and the properties which are affected. He asked if it was possible to move forward now for those properties that will only be easements. Albright commented that Jim Schlieman, HEI, is close to finalizing larger scale easement maps to evaluate. He said there will be little deviation from the current alignment but that there is room for some negotiation with individuals.

Another landowner asked if it is possible to move forward with buyouts since \$500,000 has been secured. Albright felt it is safer to ensure more funding is secured before starting the buyout process to guarantee the BRRWD would not experience a shortage of funds. Van Amburg added the primary \$500,000 is not enough to complete buyouts for everyone.

In response to a landowner question, Albright asked if the Engineer's estimate would evaluate impacts to properties located near the City of Georgetown. St. Germain confirmed this would be completed.

Albright explained the BRRWD did not want to move forward with buyouts too quickly prior to knowing if the \$3 million was secured from the State since there was no guarantee this funding would be available. He confirmed the State's 2011 Bonding Bill indicates \$3 million is available for the City of Georgetown Flood Control Project.

Albright mentioned there is potential to incorporate money back into the project. One way of accomplishing this could include the BRRWD auctioning/re-selling the structures they have acquired through buyouts. Albright stated the BRRWD should also consult with the City to thoroughly evaluate St. Germain's plan and consider areas of possible cost savings for the project.

A landowner commented they are in a similar situation as Myers, in that they have a smaller place and have until September 1, 2011, to make a decision. She is wondering how they should proceed. Albright stated the purchase agreement is a legal document, which once signed, can be taken to your realtor. The realtor should then include a contingency of sale in the purchase agreement for the new property.

Albright noted the BRRWD Board now has an idea of a timeline since homeowners need to make decisions relatively soon.

Albright explained that the State is not concerned with whether or not the levee is certified. He also commented that a certified levee would be more expensive due to the process required by the Federal Government before the project would be built. Also, the levee elevation would need to be higher and be completely enclosed for it to be certified. This means the roads would also need to be raised. Albright noted flood insurance is not necessarily required, but there could be a flood event someday that could possibly exceed the dike.

Albright noted the BRRWD will be working with Bladow and get him involved with the project details. He will then be the point of contact for landowners.

Albright commented that a homeowner does not have to move if they do not want to as long as their homes/structures do not interfere with the path of the dike. The BRRWD can use eminent domain or condemnation if their home is in the dike's path and the homeowner does not want to move.

Albright noted the State has provided the City of Georgetown with a great opportunity to improve their levee. The hope is that this new levee will provide adequate protection for the City.

There being no further testimony, Chairman Van Amburg adjourned the hearing at 9:37 PM.

Respectfully Submitted by

Bruce E. Albright, BRRWD Administrator