

White Plains Council of Neighborhood Associations  
February Meeting

Tuesday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Location: Zoom

Time: 7pm

Attendees:

Michael Sanchez, Michael Dalton, Ellen Becker, Bob Friscia, Robert Kahn, Frances Hamas Jones, Ken Kristal, Melania Kolby, Judy Lee, Daniel Leitzia, Howard Waldman, Shawn Woodford, Debra Zipf

1. Meeting called to order by President Sanchez
2. Michael Sanchez introduced the meeting's topic: Watershed Management and the effects of the Bronx River and Mamaroneck River flooding in our neighborhoods. Michael introduced our guest speakers from the Office of County Executive in Westchester County:
  - a. Aviva Meyer – Director of Policy Programs, Health & Infrastructure
  - b. Dave Kvinge – Assistant Commissioner Westchester County Department of Planning
  - c. Susan Darling – Chief Planner Westchester County Department of Planning
3. "Flooding only becomes a topic of discussion in the aftermath of a significant storm...and then recedes from discussion until the next significant storm arrives" ....was how Susan Darling, Chief Planner began the discussion of flooding and storm water management. The point being made was.... for many of us in public the importance of stormwater management and flooding is "cyclical"....rising and falling with the frequency of strong rainstorms. But, for the County's Department of Planning...working on the issue of stormwater management in Westchester County is continuous process.
4. The County instituted a Stormwater Management Law in 2011 which requires the County to develop and implement a Westchester County Flood Mitigation Plan and Advisory Board. The Department of Planning works with municipalities throughout Westchester County to design and build flood mitigation solutions. Developing a Flood Mitigation Plan for a municipality is a "partnership" between the local municipality and the County.... with the municipality and County each sharing 50% of the cost of building the Flood Mitigation solution.
5. The Department of Planning conducts interviews with the engineering staff of municipalities throughout Westchester County to determine areas requiring stormwater management and flood prevention solutions. Most of data collected in working with the municipal engineering staffs in Westchester is "anecdotal" ...it is based on the verbal observations and comments of the engineering staff interviews. The County Department of Planning does not currently conduct a great deal of "field" engineering studies of the rivers and waterways in Westchester.
6. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation is also responsible for developing Stormwater Management and Flood Mitigation plans...for municipalities throughout the entire State. The NYS DEC program is a "parallel" program to the County's program for flood prevention. The DEC program relies on more "field-based" testing & measurement of stormwater and flood risk than the County's program. The NYS DEC also designs and builds

Stormwater and Flood Mitigation solutions. The NYS DEC will often work with the County Department of Planning and a local municipality to fund and build a Flood Mitigation solution.

7. In their PowerPoint presentation Dave Kvinge and Susan Darling showed several “flood plain” maps of both the Bronx River and the Mamaroneck River.
8. Howard Waldman asked Kvinge & Darling if the County was aware that an underground river ran under the existing Galleria Mall site and would this effect the proposed redevelopment plans for the Galleria Site. Kvinge stated that the County does have mapping information for the underground river on the Galleria Site.... but, he could not comment on how the underground river may impact any proposed development on the Galleria Site. Contact Kvinge at the County Department of Planning if you would like a copy of a map showing the underground river.
9. Daniel Leitzia of Reynal Park noted that the West branch of the Mamaroneck River seems to flow at different rates when it rains. Sometimes a small rainfall will result in higher river levels than a larger rainfall. Why would that be? Dave Kvinge explained that blockages on the river (downed trees, debris, etc.) up & downstream can affect the volume of water flowing at a specific location. Also.... blockages to municipal stormwater piping can also send water into a river.... affecting water volume.
10. Kvinge was asked if “dredging” the existing riverbed would help increase a river’s water carrying capacity and help prevent flooding. Kvinge explained that “dredging” was employed in the past in an effort to increase the river’s flow capacity... but, the material brought up from the riverbed is often laden with all sorts of contaminants and substances that make the dredged “material” extremely expensive to dispose of. So...dredging is no longer an option for flood mitigation.
11. The County is currently conducting a survey to locate potential new watershed areas that can help provide stormwater storage.
12. The County will be launching a new “Citizen Science Tool” in the Spring of 2024. The “Citizen Science Tool” will allow residents of Westchester County to share photos and observations of stormwater events in their neighborhoods with the County Department of Planning.
13. In 2022, NYS passed a \$4.2 billion “Clean Water, Clean Air, Green Jobs Environmental Bond Fund. The purpose of the fund is to assist municipalities fund the construction of new environmental infrastructure projects throughout the State
14. Frances Hamas Jones noted that the Reynal Park neighborhood’s carriage bridges over the Mamaroneck River are locations which often experience flooding. She also noted that the Greenway in the Ridgeway neighborhood also saw frequent flooding. Frances asked if it was possible to get a copy of the Flood Plan Map for our neighborhoods? Dave Kvinge would send

Michael Sanchez a copy of the White Plains Flood Plan Map. A copy of the Flood Plain Map will be sent out to the CNA members when the minutes of this meeting are published.

15. Melanie Kolby asked, “is the County examining the 100 + homes planned in the Gedney Farm neighborhood?” Dave Kvinge replied that the County is not directly involved in approving the project.... that is more of local municipal matter. But, the County’s Department of Planning along with other State & Municipal agencies would be contributing to the DEIS report for the 100+ Homes project in Gedney Farms.
16. Bob Fisca asked, “does Westchester County conduct surveys of the stormwater sewer pipe conditions? Does the County have in place a maintenance program for the sewer pipes to ensure the capacity of the pipes is not compromised?” Dave Kvinge replied, “yes, the County does regularly inspect culverts and sewer pipes and takes appropriate actions as required to maintain the stormwater sewer pipe system.”
17. Michael Sanchez asked, “is there County funding to help homeowners with things like sump pumps? With the increase strength of the storms and the volume of water a rain event can deliver to our neighborhoods...homeowner insurance to protect against water damage may become a real issue.” Kvinge explained that there is no County funding for homeowner projects like sump pumps in a basement. Sanchez asked, “who do you work with in the City of White Plains?” Kvinge replied, “We work with Commissioner Gomez. The County typically works with a town’s engineer on stormwater issues. The County has not met with the White Plains City Engineer in some time.”
18. Dave Kvinge explained that County Planning Commissioner, Blanca Lopez will be visiting towns and municipalities throughout Westchester to discuss areas where the County can assist and work with a town to minimize stormwater damage. “Flooding will not be going away anytime soon ...but, we can work together to better manage flood damage.”
19. Michael Dalton followed up Mike Sanchez’s question about funding small homeowner flood control projects by describing the Community Development Program (CDP) run by the White Plains Planning Department. Dalton described how CDP assists homeowners in White Plains maintain a safe living environment in their homes. The range of projects CDP assists with might involve installing smoke detectors all the way up to a project to replace an obsolete and dangerous electrical system. The Community Development Program will “project manage” the process for a homeowner with a roster of participating contractors who will execute the home improvements and ensure that the work meets all requirements of the planning and building codes. The CDP has not historically focused on homeowner flood prevention or mitigation projects. The CDP can assist homeowners thru low interest funding of homeowner projects. The CDP does have “income eligibility” requirements for homeowners seeking low interest funding for their projects. Dalton suggested that perhaps the County’s Planning Department and the City’s Planning Department could get together and create a new program to assist homeowners

with flood prevention and mitigation projects. Dalton to follow up with the White Plains CDP staff to discuss the idea.

20. Michael Sanchez closed the discussion of Stormwater Management and thanked the guests from the County's Planning Department.
21. Michael Sanchez then recapped Planning Commissioner Chris Gomez's presentation of the "draft" Comprehensive Plan to the City's Common Council. Much of the presentation by Commission Gomez was information many of us have heard before. The Common Council heard praise, comments & criticism regarding the "draft" Comprehensive Plan from approximately 20-25 White Plains Residents.
22. Bob Frisca raised questions about the qualifications of the members of the Comprehensive Plan "Committee". Michael Dalton (a committee member) replied that the "Committee" did not **write** the "draft" Comprehensive Plan. The "Committee" was a citizen advisory group that worked (for over 1.5 years) in conjunction with the City's Planning Department and its Consultants to craft the new Plan. The "Committee" was comprised of an extremely diverse group of White Plains residents which included Michael Diviney (one of the region's foremost Planners). The Committee included a Vice President of the CNA (Michael Dalton). The Committee had young members and senior members...it had large & small business owners. It had representatives from Non-Profit Organizations and Religious groups. The Committee also was racially diverse.... with African Americans, Latin Americans, Asian Americans and Americans of European heritage.
23. Judith Lee felt that there could have been "better communication" from the City to its residents regarding the "draft" Comprehensive Plan.
24. Robert Kahn said that it was important that the Planning Department form an "Implementation Committee" to monitor the roll out and execution of the proposed initiatives in the new Comprehensive Plan. Bob felt that there should be a distinction between initiatives that can be accomplished in the "short and long terms". Initiatives that can be completed in the "short term" should be a priority...and should get completed as soon possible. Regarding the subject of increasing more neighborhood participation in CNA.... Bob suggested the CNA should form a small group of CNA members that would work with neighborhoods without Associations or with inactive Associations. The small working group would assist those inactive neighborhoods form new neighborhood Associations and become part of the CNA. Bob also suggested that the City should not allow developers to "buy out" (pay a fee to the City to change an affordable unit in a project back to a "market rate" unit) affordable housing units from their approved projects.
25. Ellen Berger raised the issue of "affordable housing" in White Plains. Ellen explained that a great many residents (30%...?) in White Plains are "housing burdened" .....meaning these residents are spending more than 33% of their take home pay on rent or mortgage payments. Ellen explained that "Affordable Housing" does not translate to mean "low-income projects". "Affordable Housing" is a supply of housing options where the rent or mortgage payments do

not exceed 33% of a resident's take home pay. At the March 12<sup>th</sup> Common Council meeting "Affordable Housing" in White Plains will be on the agenda.

26. President Sanchez then closed the meeting.