

Climate Change Resiliency Committee meeting 3/13/2024, 5:30 pm

1910 Building, Town Offices & via Zoom

Present at 1910 Building: Rick Parker, Chip Wallace, Liz Callahan, and Christine Wallace, DPW Projects Manager.
On Zoom Elisa Grammer
Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89289530217>

GEI March 1 deliverables

Ms. Grammer said that it is jarring to see the [two memos](#) about flood risk indicate generally that flooding will not be a problem for decades into the future when we have been seeing quite a bit of flooding now. She noted that she had shared a photo of the area of River Road east of the Coffin Street intersection completely submerged on March 10. Yet page 8 of the Merrimack River Flood Risk Analysis said in section 2.1.6 that “This section of River Road would not likely be inundated during typical daily tides in 2030 or 2050. However, this area would likely experience daily inundation during high tides by 2070 and inundation during 100-yr coastal storm events by 2030. The Preliminary FEMA FIRMs suggest that this intersection would likely be inundated during a 100-yr riverine event.”

Ms. Grammer said there was no reason to believe that the rain or river status on March 9-10 was a 100-yr event. She suggested that both reports should be rewritten to acknowledge current experiences of flooding, which are all pictured by date on the [slideshow on the CCRC website](#). She noted that Ms. Pau said that the tides are in reality higher than the projected calculated tides and suggested that may be part of the disconnect between the projections and what we are actually experiencing. *The group agreed that a major question is when the road becomes too flooded too often.*

Ms. Wallace noted that the culvert analysis lacks backup data such as a watershed map for the culverts. That information would be very useful for future work dealing with the culverts, and she believes that the consultants have that information. Ms. Grammer wondered if one reason for the seeming discrepancy in the projections could be that the Coffin stream’s impacts were not considered. Ms. Wallace said that should be part of the watershed analysis and we should be able to see the backup data for that.

Ms. Wallace will contact Ms. Pike with preliminary comments noted at this meeting so that perhaps GEI can do a revision before the consultant/Town meeting at the end of the month.

Ms. Grammer pointed out the following additional issues with the document entitled “DRAFT Merrimack River Flood Risk Analysis River Road: Evaluating Vulnerabilities and Options to Promote Resiliency West Newbury, Massachusetts

- The memo does not include “Options to Promote Resiliency”
- For the chart on page 9, is there any way to understand the likely duration of flood events?
- This memo discusses impact to “roads, trails, buildings, and drainage infrastructure” (p 2)—what about the utility poles? There is one, for instance, at the culvert by the farm field that appears to be set in the stones shoring up the riverbank. A picture of that is included on the [CCRC website slideshow](#).
- The discussion of limitations should be expanded to deal with the variance between the projections and current reality. If things like overland/underground flows, increased heavy rainfall or anything else that contributes to the flooding are not considered, or combined impacts of various events are not addressed, these omissions should be identified in the limitations.
- Should the Fig 2 series of maps showing flood inundation explicitly state that flooding coming from upstream on the Merrimack are not included?

Ms. Grammer identified the following issues with the document entitled “DRAFT River Road Flood Risk Analysis River Road: Evaluating Vulnerabilities and Options to Promote Resiliency West Newbury, Massachusetts”

- The memo does not include “Options to Promote Resiliency”
- Given that it apparently addresses “selected design storms” while as stated on page 5 “In reality, sections of River Road may be overtopped due to other means, including coastal storm surge, high riverine flow rates within the Merrimack River, astronomical high tide events, or a combination thereof.” should the title of the document and the limitations make the specific focus of this report more clear? And isn’t it quite likely that the events will occur in tandem as opposed to on an isolated basis?
- Again, the road east of the Coffin St intersection was flooded and culvert CU-R13 was overtopped on March 10. Looking at the chart on page 5, was that a 10-year precipitation event or something else?
- The limitations section on page 5 says that the H&H model is “comprehensive and conservative”—which again raises questions about current day experience vs rosier predictions. Also, the limitations section should mention the various other events that are likely to be present during a big rainfall but not considered like tides

Ms. Callahan asked if the consultants could identify the primary drivers of problems and vulnerabilities at various locations. Ms. Wallace said that our MVP state representative Michelle Rowden did receive the draft reports and did reach out to Ms. Wallace about them. *Ms. Wallace will send the consultants consolidated comments on the draft memos by March 27 and the CCRC members are welcome to send additional thoughts to her.*

GMRI Future planning event—4/3/2024

Ms. Grammer and Ms. Wallace heard the consultants’ description of this, which remains unclear because the event was to include values and emotional reactions plus a talk by a statistician about how to understand projections and models. Ms. Wallace said that it sounds like the consultants have an idea about what they want to do. Ms. Callahan said that there could be break out tables like the process used for the MVP planning grant. Mr. Wallace said that people know what is going on with sea level rise and climate change so it may be best to stress education and tools to understand what might be done as opposed to emphasizing shared values. Ms. Wallace said that 3 hours is too long but it could be done like the Town Norum in November, where the doors were open early and people could mingle before and after.

It was generally agreed that

- *Ms. Wallace needs to have a call/meeting with consultants Gayle Bonness and Leila Pike and the Town Manager to get a more definitive plan for this event*
- *As discussed in the context of comments on the report, the discussion needs to reflect experienced flooding **now**—not just projections indicating flooding will not occur until years from now*
- *We need to have an agenda and an outline of the program so that we can advertise it and invite people*
- *We need to reserve the Annex for this event*
- *We might aim for 30-40 people and a starting place for invitations is the Climate@WNewbury.org email list*

GMRI Citizen science update

Ms. Wallace said that the March 11 event was well attended and went well. The Town Manager, Conservation Agent, and Ms. Wallace attended as well as a number of River Road residents.

Ms. Grammer asked if there was anything from that event that could be posted on the CCRC website. *Ms. Wallace will provide for the website*

- *Photos from the event*
- *The MyCoast worksheet handed out at the event*
- *A corrected version of the GMRI [storymap](#)*

CCRC events

Mr. Parker said that he reached the Plum Island Kayak people who are interested in working on the CCRC kayak tour. They recommend going out at low flat tide times and having different put in and take out spots in order not to have to paddle against the tide. Timing will depend on tide cycles. *It was decided that a Wednesday afternoon with rain date on Thursday in the first part of June would be the best time to do this.*

Mr. Wallace noted that the advertised price is \$50 for a 2 hour tour, \$60 for a 3 hour tour. *Ms. Wallace will find out how much of the \$750 grant budget for boat tours is left over from the initial boat tour and thus available for the kayak project.*

The CCRC was uncertain about its proposed guided walk along River Road in view of GEI's deliverable of a walk along River Road. *Ms. Wallace will inquire about what the consultants have in mind.*

Approval of Minutes

The Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the February 14 meeting.

Other Business

Ms. Wallace said that a potential last minute addition to the town meeting warrant would fund additional work on the River Road issue. This could include consultant assistance to keep the working group going and staying on task, looking at potential near term solutions.

Mr. Wallace said that in terms of defining the scope of work, the culverts are a current concern. Ms. Callahan said that it would be good to have an idea of permitting requirements. Ms. Grammer noted that if we want to apply for a grant, we will need to have the matching funds authorized ahead of time by town meeting.

The group generally supported the idea of having funds for preparedness in the event something serious happens to River Road in the near term. This could include

- A roadmap for permitting infrastructure from environmental agencies (state and perhaps federal) and for authorizing restrictions on use of the road (e.g. weight limitations—likely a MassDOT matter)*
- An engineering assessment of the roadbed*
- Concepts for dealing with the most vulnerable areas*
- Identifying the range of grant opportunities*

Ms. Wallace will check in with Michelle Rowden, our state MVP representative. It was noted that permitting is a key first step, perhaps even in applying for a grant. Ms. Callahan noted that the state is updating permitting requirements in light of climate change. *She will look into the new rules.*

Next Meeting: April 10, 2024

Adjournment

7:11 pm

Meeting materials

GEI March 1 deliverables

Minutes of February consultant meeting