

Thurston County Flood Planning Committee Meeting Notes



Wednesday, July 19, 2017 – 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. (meeting extended overtime to 5:00)

Thurston Regional Planning Council – 2424 Heritage Court SW, Olympia, WA

Conference Room A

Present: Pat Allen, Scott Boettcher, Cal Bray, Paul Brewster, Tris Carlson, Howard Glastetter, Andrew Kinney, Mark Maurer, Meghan Porter, Tim Rubert, Trevin Taylor, Alan Vanell, and George Walter

Absent: Robert Scott, Allison Osterberg

1. Introductions

Paul Brewster, Senior Planner, Thurston Regional Planning Council, facilitated the meeting. The committee members introduced themselves.

2. Thurston County Flood Hazards Mitigation Plan Mitigation Strategy Review

Planner Paul Brewster informed the committee that he met twice during the previous two weeks with a group of Thurston County staff to review the flood mitigation strategy. The group reviewed the county's 2012 initiatives and flood-related initiatives from the county's recently adopted Hazards Mitigation Plan. The group identified 21 initiatives. The objective of the meeting is to review all of the proposed initiatives and determine if any additional initiatives are necessary. The committee is also tasked with identifying the top five initiatives.

Paul oriented the committee members to the mitigation initiative terms and definitions that were used for the 2012 Flood Hazards Mitigation Plan (see the committee materials for reference). These include: 1. "Cost" to implement (high, medium, and low); 2. "Benefit Rating", (high, medium, and low); 3. "Timeline" to implement (short-term, long-term, and ongoing); and 4. Priority order in which the county should focus its efforts (high, medium, and low). The members responded that the definitions for "priority" focus too much on the financial readiness of the initiatives and don't sufficiently describe priority in terms of life safety or the initiatives ability to reduce hazard impacts. The committee directed staff to revise the priority terms to balance financial readiness and the overall benefits of the initiative.

Paul presented a tally of the number of initiatives that support each goal and objectives in the plan. The 21 draft initiatives support all the draft goals and objectives. A tally of the number of initiatives supporting Community Rating System mitigation categories was also summarized:

- Prevention, 17
- Property Protection, 2
- Public Information, 5
- Natural Resource Protection, 5
- Emergency Services, 2
- Structural Projects, 2

Paul introduced the committee to 21 draft initiatives. Many carried over from the 2012 plan and were updated to reflect current needs and status. Some initiatives were merged while others

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were imported from the county's all-hazards mitigation plan. Thirteen initiatives from the previous plan were omitted because they were completed, are no longer relevant, or were combined to form a new initiative for the plan update. The omitted initiatives will be included in the updated plan to document the county's progress and evaluation of its flood mitigation strategy.

The draft initiatives are sorted into blank activity groups:

1. Dam Failure, Evacuation, Planning, and Response, 2
2. Infrastructure, 2
3. Mapping, Data, and Protocols, 7
4. Flood Hazard Reduction, 2
5. Natural Functions and Ecosystem Services, 2
6. Finance, Implementation, and Coordination, 4
7. Public Education and Awareness, 2



The committee reviewed each initiative and provided feedback on the activity, its priority, cost, and timeline, where appropriate. In general, the committee responded favorably to the range of initiatives and the overall direction of the county's proposed flood mitigation strategy. The committee directed staff to rewrite Initiative 17, County Flood Program Manager Appointment, to broaden the scope to evaluate opportunities for managing the flood program activities, and to avoid stating a solution. The committee suggested this initiative could be integrated with Initiative 16, Comprehensive Flood Program Finance Strategy.

At 4:00 p.m., members Scott Boettcher and Meghan Porter left the meeting. The remaining members agreed to continue meeting overtime to participate in the initiative prioritization process. Members were tasked to rank their top five priority projects using a numerical ranking of 1 (highest) through 5 considering each project's ability to reduce flood hazards. All 21 initiatives were presented on two posters. In the first round, 15 initiatives were identified as priorities. The 5 initiatives with the highest count or votes advanced to round 2. For round 2, the initiatives were ranked 1 through 5 by each committee member. The initiatives with the lowest points ranked the highest and so on. At the end of round two, the results were tallied. The top five initiatives are ranked as follows:

RANK	ID	Title
1	12	Vulnerable Structures and Repetitive Loss Mitigation Program
2	17	County Flood Program Manager Appointment

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3	3	Culvert Replacement Flood Mitigation Program
4	5	Flood Data Collection, Modeling, and Evaluation Program
5	4	Road Repair and Reconstruction Flood Mitigation Program

No additional ranking of the initiatives was performed, however a few of the committee members expressed that public education and outreach should be a priority for the county.

While not on the agenda, committee member Howard Glastetter requested the committee consider a proposal to draft a letter on behalf of the Thurston County Board of Commissioners to address Tacoma Power's fall/winter Alder Lake level. Howard shared a letter (posted online: <http://www.trpc.org/806/Flood-Planning-Committee>) articulating his position that downstream Nisqually River flood risks could be mitigated by reducing the reservoir levels 10 feet below normal operational capacity in the fall/winter season to provide a capacity buffer against higher than normal precipitation levels from atmospheric rivers and other winter storms. Howard believes that the Nisqually Valley flood levels of 1977, 1995, and 1996 were made worse by Alder dam outflows. Understanding that the Nisqually Hydroelectric Project is regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Howard believes a recommendation from the Flood Planning Committee to the County Commissioners to draft a letter to Tacoma Power requesting a change in lake levels would be a first step for Thurston County to work with the utility company to reduce riverine flood risks compounded by Alder Dam operations.

Planner Brewster encouraged the committee members to share their positions and discuss Howard's proposal. George Walter, Nisqually Tribe, stated that the Nisqually Tribe will not support the recommendation and further offered that Tacoma Power is a good partner with the Tribe. He further stated that although the Alder Dam's primary function is electrical generation, there have been occasions where Tacoma Power cooperated with downstream communities by regulating its outflow to avoid adverse impacts. He also elaborated that there are complex hydrological conditions that contribute to flooding in the Nisqually Valley that are not attributed to the dams.

The other committee members expressed the need to study the issue more closely, as there is no data to base any optimal lake level reductions that would mitigate fall or winter flooding (draft Initiative 5 could be flexible to support such studies). County staff member Pat Allen stated that any member of the committee is welcome, as a private citizen, to make such a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners at any time.

Planner Brewster responded to Howard that none of the other committee members, who were present, shared Howard's position and there was no consensus to take the proposal any further. Paul thanked Howard for bringing his issue before the committee.

5. Public Comments

No additional participants attended the meeting. No public comments were received.

6. Adjourn

Paul announced that he will work with Pat Allen to set the date for the second public meeting, sometime in late August. An email announcement will notify the planning committee members

