

**King County  
Flood Control District Advisory Committee  
Meeting Report**

**May 19, 2011**

**Meeting Attendees**

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**Committee Members**

Richard Bonewits, King County Unincorporated Area Councils  
Mike Cero, City of Mercer Island, SCA Alternate  
Suzette Cooke, City of Kent  
Don Davidson, City of Bellevue  
Lee Grummand, City of Carnation  
Jim Haggerton, City of Tukwila  
Kenneth Hearing, City of North Bend  
Fred Jarrett, King County Executive's Office  
Matt Larson, City of Snoqualmie  
Dennis Law, City of Renton  
Bob Lee, City of Lake Forest Park  
Pete Lewis, City of Auburn  
Mike O'Brien, City of Seattle  
Michael Park, City of Federal Way  
Bill Thomas, City of Algona

**King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks, Water and Land Resources  
Division Staff**

Brian Murray, Policy and Programs Supervisor  
Mark Isaacson, Water and Land Resources Division Manager

**Committee Staff**

Margaret Norton-Arnold, Facilitator  
Fala Frazier, Administrative Assistant

**Meeting Accomplishments**

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At this meeting the Flood Control Advisory Committee:

- Agreed with the project/budget reprioritization for 2011 as proposed by King County staff.
- Agreed that the District Board of Supervisors should respond to the immediate need of levee accreditation for the Green River cities and also recommended that this issue be addressed in the Flood Control Plan Update.
- Learned about the 2012-2017 CIP and operating budget for the District. The group will make a recommendation on this budget at its June meeting.

## **2011 Capital Program Re-Prioritization**

At its April meeting, the committee had heard about the need to re-prioritize some of the projects in the capital improvement program for 2011. Brian responded to the questions that had been raised in April: One member wondered if the County was repairing the same flood-damaged sites over and over, or if substantive improvements were being made to the overall system. Brian provided a handout of the flood damages and repairs showing where long-term solutions have been or will be put in place.

Also in April a member had asked for a comprehensive overview of the District's revenues and expenditures. Brian provided that information to the group as well.

The committee unanimously agreed to recommend that the reprioritization of budget and capital projects be implemented as proposed by King County staff.

## **Preliminary 2012-2017 Budget and Capital Financing Options – Information Only**

Brian presented the preliminary 2012-2017 budget. A copy of Brian's powerpoint presentation was provided to all members.

To provide for expenditures scheduled in the current CIP and identified in the adopted 2011 budget resolution, new capital financing options will likely to be necessary over the next several years. Brian explained four options under consideration:

**Option A – CIP Reprioritization.** Projects would get deferred based on priority to shift funding for new projects. It is less efficient to carry this out as projects get closer to construction, and the most likely impacts would occur on the Cedar and Snoqualmie Rivers. The downside is continued exposure to flood risks for those areas where projects have been deferred.

**Option B – Short-Term Financing.** Under this option, King County would borrow money on behalf of the District, and the District would repay the loan; interest rates are likely to be relatively low.

**Option C – Cash-Flow Management & Pooling of Acquisition Funds.** In this scenario the District would borrow from itself, moving money slated for acquisition projects if the acquisition isn't quite ready, and applying that money toward other projects. As acquisition deals come to the fore, the District could perhaps take out a short-term loan (Option B) to pay for those properties.

**Option D – Bonds.** While this might be a worthwhile option, the District itself cannot bond without a public vote. The County could take out bonds, however, and provide those funds to the District.

### **Committee Discussion**

As members discussed these options, they were overwhelmingly in favor of options B or C. They said they do not believe bonding is the best path forward. And, as they have in the past, committee members reiterated that it is important not to defer projects that have already been planned, are in engineering, or are close to construction.

Committee members had some questions about the seawall. One member noted it had not been a part of the original mandate of the Flood Control District. He was concerned about the progress actually being made in terms of flood mitigation on the river systems in the County, *will the seawall stand in the way of these other projects?*

In response, Brian pointed to the Annual Report from the District, which does highlight where progress is being made to both reduce risk, and mitigate for the impacts, of flooding.

Another member wondered about the “sunset” on the legislation for the Flood District, and which projects might fall off the list because of the seawall. Brian responded that there is no automatic sunset in place; it is presumed that the District will continue as authorized by the Board of Supervisors. And, if the Board authorizes one of the borrowing options as outlined, no projects will fall off due to a lack of funding.

Another member wondered if the District would have any control over the way in which the seawall money is spent, noting that there has been a great deal of media coverage associated with redevelopment on the Seattle waterfront. Brian responded that the District does not give grants; any funding from the District will go to the most critical portion of seawall construction. For all contracts, the District clearly defines the final product, and will be accountable to see that the money is spent consistent with the defined products and schedules.

### **Committee Discussion: Operating Costs.**

On another subject, part of the District’s operating budget includes \$50,000 for public outreach related to safety on the County’s rivers. Members wondered about this expenditure. Brian explained that it is related to the large wood that gets placed in the rivers for flood risk reduction projects; there have been concerns that this can pose a danger to river users if they are unprepared, e.g. not wearing life vests. Members asked for additional information about this: *If these are ongoing programs, who has been paying until now and why is it now showing up in the District’s costs?*

Members were generally supportive of the proposed budget, and will formulate a budget recommendation at the committee’s meeting in June.

### **Levee Accreditation**

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The committee discussed the levee accreditation issue that had been introduced in April. This is a particularly critical issue for the Green River valley cities. Accreditation is considered necessary to remove uncertainties that may cause businesses to relocate outside of the Puget

Sound region. Without the County's agreement to maintain levees consistent with the certified Operations and Maintenance manual, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will not accredit the levee. Without accreditation, businesses and residents would be subject to floodplain development regulations as well as increased insurance costs for structures in a mapped hazard area.

The Green River cities had proposed that the District work with them to help achieve levee accreditation in advance of new FEMA maps showing much of the lower Green River valley in a mapped flood hazard area. The City of Kent has spent about \$7 million already to obtain engineering certification of seven levee segments, but a vote to approve the motion in front of the District Board of Supervisors might require a commitment of funding from the District in the future for additional construction, maintenance, or recertification and reaccreditation when the FEMA accreditation expires in 10 years. It was clarified that the request is for a commitment to maintenance, and that these costs could be kept similar to current projected costs if a risk-based approach to maintenance were used. The question in front of the committee was to ask for the group's recommendation on whether or not the motion should be approved by the Board, and/or if levee accreditation should be part of the longer-term flood plan update currently being initiated by King County.

As part of the discussion, another motion was proposed, which was to broaden the motion to include accreditation on levees throughout King County, not just those located on the Green River.

In addition, the Suburban Cities Association offered the concept that future levee maintenance should take place according to a risk-based analysis approach. This risk analysis would be applied throughout King County.

Members were in general agreement that levee accreditation is important, although they had concerns about the degree of liability that might eventually rest with the District. Members unanimously agreed that this issue should be addressed in the flood plan update. There were varying opinions, however, on the appropriate role of the District in responding to the shorter-term needs of the Green River cities as highlighted by the motion currently in front of the Board.

After discussion, members agreed to recommend to the Board of Supervisors that the original motion (focused on the Green River), the proposed second motion (broadening the scope to include other rivers), and the third concept of a risk-based analysis approach all be considered by the Board of Supervisors as it acts to provide assistance to the Green River cities. Members were in general agreement that the District should be working with, and assisting these cities, in some manner. Members agreed with this language offered by Mayor Suzette Cooke:

*The King County Flood Control District will continue to work in collaboration with the cities to efficiently complete levee projects and maintain and repair levees in a way that can meet certification requirements while also providing higher level of protection.*

In arriving at this recommendation, however, members emphasized the following points:

- We need to get a better handle on the District's liability exposure under an accreditation program. If the levee is certified and accredited and the District is responsible for maintenance, what happens when flooding occurs and the businesses behind those levees don't have insurance? Will the District be liable for damages?
- If the risk-based approach to maintenance is not accepted by the certifying engineer or FEMA, the issue should be brought back for further discussion by the Advisory Committee.
- We should have a broader policy concerning development behind levees. Is the land in the lower Green fully built out, or will accreditation encourage more development and more risk exposure to less frequent but higher magnitude flood events? We should not be allowing additional new development behind levees. This principle should be applied for longer-term planning.
- Are we planning for the right horizon? It seems that 100-year floods are occurring with a great deal more regularity than every 100 years. We need to make sure that we have the best possible science, data, and information in hand to be able to accurately estimate and prepare for the floods of the future. All levees have the potential to be breached or overtopped; we need to be prepared for the worst and take a hard look at whether or not the old definitions of 100-year and 500-year floods still make sense.

Note: the Flood District's Executive Committee forwarded a motion that incorporated the Advisory Committee's proposed language on Monday 5/23. The motion will be forwarded to the full Board of Supervisors, and is available here:

[http://www.kingcounty.gov/council/clerk/materials\\_interest.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/council/clerk/materials_interest.aspx)

## Next Meeting

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The next meeting of the Flood Control Advisory Committee will be Thursday, June 16<sup>th</sup>, at Kirkland City Hall, 9:30-11:30 a.m.