

# Cedar River Council

## DRAFT Meeting Notes

March 24, 2020 – 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm  
Meeting/Conference Call  
via King County SKYPE for Business

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### I) Call to Order/Welcome & Introductions

Chair Max Prinsen called today's meeting to order at 3:00 pm. Mr. Prinsen and Nathan Brown reviewed general housekeeping and conduct tips for a Skype meeting.

### II) Follow-Up Discussion: Floods, Sandbags, & Other Related Suggestions (From Prior Meeting)

#### *Presentation: King County River & Floodplain Management Section (RFMS) Staff*

After the prior CRC meeting, Mr. Brown asked Chris Brummer with King County's RFMS to return to follow-up on several questions covering issues posed by the public about flooding, sandbags, and related concerns. Mr. Brummer was joined by fellow RFMS staffer Nancy Sandford to answer additional questions.

#### 1) What changes can be made to the sandbag program to better serve residents; can King County provide free sandbags?

Mr. Brummer said there are sites in Renton and Black Diamond where the public can pick up sandbags. While there are no other current sites in the Cedar River basin, the County is bringing that to its decision makers before next season. They have to consider adequate space for staging and loading materials by the public. The site must also be located outside a floodplain. A partner agency is then required to help manage a site, as it would be open 24/7 year-round. He emphasized that people can prepare by getting sandbags prior to events. 25 bags per person is the limit, but Mr. Brummer suggested neighborhoods could also learn to stage beforehand.

#### 2) Is Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) communicating with public about dam releases and flood forecasts?

SPU's current communications are focused on preparation, about getting the public information during a flood. Residents in a floodplain are provided a brochure, with information including numbers to call. There is also a County flood app to track selected gauges and forecasts. The County's flood warning communications are gathered from a variety of sources, but its river forecasts come from Northwest Rivers Forecast Center (NRFC). Mr. Brummer said there is much to take into account, not just dam releases. NRFC typically updates twice daily. However, forecasts can change. Anyone can look at gauges to see if a forecast is accurate, but the County is only able to report out the data it has.

For updates on river forecasts, the County is evaluating what has worked and what hasn't. Precipitation in the Cedar River basin in this event was more than models expected, and that did affect the forecast. But the County team is looking at ways to work better with the forecast center to improve data and better relay it to the public. They are in constant contact with SPU as well. If the County hasn't heard from the forecast center, they get on the phone with the center and if need be other agencies, including USGS. Another key public tool is the USGS Water Alert app, where people can sign up for customized alerts when a gauge hits a certain level, among other triggers. Mr. Brummer said another thing the County's Flood Warning Center (FWC) does in flood events is set up "phone trees" for callouts. He advised neighborhoods could each form their own "tree" and specify a contact person to be notified in the FWC's callout list.

#### 3) What is the County doing about large wood in rivers?

Rivers are dynamic and dangerous. There were many changes in the Cedar River, including recruitment and depositing of hundreds of trees in the channel. This provides habitat for endangered fish, but can pose a danger for novice river users. The King County Sheriff's office usually assesses the rivers in late spring, with technical assistance from RFMS staff. Based on the risk found, the Sheriff will determine if warning signs are needed or a river is navigable. The Sheriff also decides if to close a river. The County is now assessing repair needs in places where fallen trees threaten critical infrastructure, like roads, trails, levees, and revetments. If the County takes action, they must seek permits from WDFW to reposition or remove wood, as it's valuable to habitat. This includes costly mitigation efforts. The County is now also trying to navigate around the ongoing COVID-19 virus situation in how it prioritizes its work.

#### 4) What will be the County's response to impacts due to the avulsion at Dorre Don?

RFMS will recommend to the Flood Control District (FCD) that a hazard assessment be performed for properties along that reach. The County will work with partners, permitting agencies, and tribes before any action is taken. Janne Kaje with WLRD's salmon recovery teams has said the avulsion provided some short- and long-term habitat gains for rearing and spawning fish. In terms of flood hazard, the avulsion improves the river's access to the floodplain, which allows the river to spread and generally lowers risk.

Several attendees had follow-up questions and comments for the RFMS team:

- **Norm Skjelbreia:** King County has set the sandbag limit to 25 per person, which covers a front and back door of a house. This wouldn't do anything for erosion or levee topping. Is there anyone at the County that can organize or come out with a truck/trailer full of sand, with a crew for more substantial sandbagging? This would be a cheap way to prevent erosion and having to come back with a more costly fix later.

**Chris Brummer:** There were two instances on the Cedar where the County did that in this event. It's not as simple as calling a crew out. Emergency permits are needed from WDFW or US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) as well as Department of Local Services (DLS), and while that can be done on an emergency basis, it carries a lot of responsibility. It requires mitigation after the fact. Sometimes building up a levee on one bank pushes the problem to the other bank. I don't know the background on the sandbag program, but I can see how bringing in more material would constitute a need for an emergency permit.

**Nancy Sandford:** I'm not sure where the 25 per person limit came from, but I agree it's a minimal amount. What Chris says today is that you can gather supplies in advance and buy more if needed.

**Norm S.:** I fought floods with USACE for 40 years in different jurisdictions. I'm familiar with these issues, but they're not "showstoppers." For an emergency permit: I could make a call to WDFW, or it can come from USACE – it should come from the local government backed by USACE. USACE can come out in a blink of an eye. I would order 10,000 sandbags at a time for an area about to flood, and there was no cost to local government. The bags just have to be stored and doled out appropriately. The real challenge is to get sandbaggers. We offered training at local high schools, community service events, etc., usually held in fall. Corrections inmates are actually the best workers to fill and haul and place sandbags, crews can be brought out 24 hours a day. Sandbagging is an old-fashioned art, but it saves a lot in the long run. There are legal ways to get around permit issues, and you do have to mitigate for any damage you cause, but sandbags are only temporary. I've never heard of an agency having to mitigate for a sandbag emergency. I'd be willing to share my experience if it would be beneficial. These are all valid issues, but there are ways to get through.

**Nancy S.:** When I started 30 years ago, we were doing sandbag trainings, partnering with USACE. This was discontinued due to an unfortunate lack of interest. But there might be some ideas for neighborhood groups to coordinate – have the County request to USACE, etc. I think the permitting world was different back then, and there was more awareness that water pushed from one property impacts another. But sandbags certainly can be a valuable temporary protection measure. Maple Valley Fire Station was one place we stationed sandbags, but it hindered station operations and couldn't continue there. Renton is one stop that has sandbags as well.

I see questions about the nighttime dam releases. Chris talked about the forecasting. SPU manages the dam; I know the County is evaluating what happened in this recent flood. NRFC does not have much data available now due to staffing issues from COVID-19. But there was increased precipitation. What you see below the dam is not just the releases, and I believe there was considerable precipitation in the basin creating inflow above the dam. The USGS water alert app – I emphasize, it's a great tool. It lets you set your own specific triggers and filters.

- **Question:** What are the permitting issues with sandbagging?  
**Chris B.:** DLS looks at it, King County Emergency Management looks at it, then assesses sandbag limits. There are also larger "super bags" – we had to get permits for those. There then has to be a plan to remove the sandbags after the event.
- **Jeff Neuner:** How are damage sites prioritized?  
**Chris B.:** We have internal meetings on that. We're doing that now, and presenting to the FCD in April. We're still on that schedule. I can update Nathan if that changes.
- **Max Prinsen:** There was an emergency call-in number in the last flood, to advise of work being done by a landowner to prevent flood damage, who would then get a permit after-the-fact. Does that still exist?  
**Larry Fisher:** This may be referring to a WDFW emergency hotline number; there is an after-hours number people can call – but WDFW does not issue after-the-fact permits.  
**Chris B.:** There is a number for USACE as well, and for DLS if you're in unincorporated King County.

Mr. Brown thanked Mr. Brummer and Ms. Sandford, and said the CRC looks forward to continued updates from them. Mr. Brummer advised the CRC to let his team know if there are any other questions.

Larry Fisher spoke briefly on several other recent flood damage sites:

- About a mile above I-405, a Renton Parks property has a big gouge/erosion that needs repair.
- King County Parks has a property at the end of Dorre Don Rd., where the river has gouged out the corner of a steep bank.
- A major repair: 300 feet of rock riprap was installed near Cavanaugh Pond. WDFW is waiting for King County to redesign the Riverbend project in a more bioengineered way.

### III) CRC Updates

a) **WRIA 8:** Corinne Young reported on items from the last Salmon Recovery Council (SRC) meeting.

- An interim guidance memo has been issued on artificial lighting impacts to salmon.
- There is an update on the statewide strategy for salmon recovery, and will be chances for public input.
- The Watershed Restoration and Enhancement Committee (WREC) is calling for streamflow restoration projects.
- There is a memo to Dave Upthegrove on the KCC, to ask for budget amendment approval.
- SRC meeting packet is online at [https://www.govlink.org/watersheds/8/committees/src\\_meetings.aspx](https://www.govlink.org/watersheds/8/committees/src_meetings.aspx)

b) **Fish & Habitat Conservation/Restoration (Sockeye):** Max Prinsen said he is still working with Governor Inslee's office to get a reply to the CRC's letter requesting the Governor's help coordinating sockeye recovery. However, especially with ongoing COVID-19 concerns, that's largely on hold for now. Mr. Prinsen is continuing to pursue this; there is some future work that may happen regarding sockeye recovery efforts.

c) **Cedar River Watershed/Water Supply:** Jamie Thompson of SPU said they are looking at starting the reservoir refill process now, which typically kicks off in early/mid-April for summer drawdown. There is also a pretty good snowpack this year.

d) **Future Agenda Topic(s):**

- Mr. Prinsen suggested updates on the Lakeside Industries asphalt plant - maybe looking at the gas line issue again. This plant has a huge impact to the Maple Valley highway and he said it should be known what's going on with it.
- Mr. Prinsen said the Endangered Species Act is being reassessed; this may be relevant to the CRC, especially regarding sockeye.
- Mr. Prinsen advised anyone with questions or updates between meetings to email Nathan Brown, who will follow up as he can.

e) **COVID-19 Impacts to CRC Meetings:**

- Mr. Brown said due to the ongoing pandemic concerns, virtual meetings will be the standard for the time being. He said there seem to be some technical issues with using Skype, and noted that Zoom may be a more appropriate option for larger meetings. He suggested the CRC may try Zoom for holding next month's meeting. Several attendees noted their own use of Zoom and that it seems better and more user-friendly than Skype.
- Mr. Brown asked for feedback on changing the regular time of CRC meetings. He noted that in doing meetings virtually, travel time to meeting venues is no longer a concern. Several attendees voiced a preference for afternoon meetings, but others preferred to keep evenings. Mr. Brown agreed to send a survey to CRC members and the CRC email distribution list to see what the prevailing preference is.
- Mr. Prinsen said all SHADOW events have been cancelled, including volunteer events, which has had a big impact to their work.
- Valerie O'Halloran said the Renton mayor has closed all City park facilities. She asked if that had translated along the Cedar River Trail as well. Corinne Young said the trail is still open. Other attendees noted several local cities have parks and play areas closed, but people can walk around.

### IV) Public Comment

There was no public comment during this period.

### V) Adjourn:

- Next meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 28. Mr. Brown will reach out to determine an exact time.
- Today's meeting adjourned early at 4:04 pm.