

North Gresham Neighborhood Association Board Meeting Minutes [DRAFT]

2022-08-22

This meeting was held at the Rockwood Village Condominium Clubhouse, 18550 NE Wasco Street, Portland, OR 97230.

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 PM on Monday, August 22, 2022. Present were board members Mike Elston, Linda Van Deusen-Price, and Kim Kovacs, and guest Bailey Langley, the Communications & Outreach Intern for the Multnomah County Drainage District.

Linda V moved the minutes from the July meeting be approved; Mike seconded. Unanimously approved.

Bailey began the meeting with a presentation on upcoming work on the system of levies along the Columbia in our county. The drainage district has just received approval to charge all of Multnomah County for maintaining the system. She said it was likely that a lot more people, including those in our area, will be asked to pay. Mike mentioned that much of the benefit of the levy system goes to the warehouses in the flood plain, and he thinks they're the ones who should be paying. They've been asked and haven't contributed to the community, so the only way to have them pay their fair share is to tax them. Bailey said one of the issues is that these corporations feel it's cheaper to relocate or fix things after the fact than pay to maintain the levy system.

After Katrina, the Army Corp of Engineers and FEMA updated their standards, and they're now requiring a levy where we don't currently have one, which would require buying private property. It should have been done in 1949. The current levy runs from North Portland Road to 223rd. You don't see them, because they're covered with vegetation. As more homes have been built, it became apparent work needed to be done – water couldn't flow into the Columbia. And so they built pump stations. So now we have two forms of flooding that can happen: When the river is very high, and what they call "internal flooding," when the pumps can't keep up with the water that backs up due to rain/drainage. Some flooding actually happened at Fairview Lake earlier this year because a houseless encampment was blocking access to the pump station. Those properties started to flood – mostly localized flooding – but it started a lot of people talking about how to prevent this in the future. They ended up having to hire armed security guards to help them get to the pump house.

Bailey said they can now get into the pump station once a week. They've also spent money to place big boulders around it to keep people from camping around the immediate area, but it's still sketchy. It's City of Portland property, but they're unwilling to do much about it; it's lower priority. It's one part of what's making this more expensive, but it's not all of it. After Katrina, the federal government started enacting all sorts of use standards. There are economic consequences if these standards aren't met. Several agencies got together to figure out what to do – The Port of Portland, Metro, Multnomah County, etc. – to see what could be done. They identified two things: 1) It's time to make big infrastructure investments – the system hasn't been maintained in 60 years; 2) Consolidate the four drainage districts currently maintaining the levies into one. They decided to expand the boundaries of the district to all of Multnomah County. There have been studies of the economic benefits of the levy system, and they found that most of that benefit is located in Multnomah County. The idea is the total cost will be spread across all Multnomah County residents, making it a very small fee for all.

They're thinking of going to the voters and asking them to pass a general obligation bond for the capital investment. But there's also discussion about how to pay for ongoing maintenance. At some point in the next year or so there will be an operating fee – but there's a lot of debate going on. It may be based on economic benefit, or physical benefit. The methodology hasn't been determined yet, but it may have to do with the size of your property or the amount of concrete (and therefore runoff) that it has.



Gresham, Fairview, Troutdale, Wood Village, Maywood Park are all very sensitive to the idea of asking residents to pay. There's some thought about charging a small fee to everyone, but then charge a higher fee for those in the flood plain. Historically those folks have been paying, while those in the drainage area have received the benefit. There may be a way that Portland pays and then passes on the fee to customers with higher rates. But it's likely there will be a bond measure.

Mike thinks it'll be a tough sell, but that it would be important for residents to know that the bulk of the fee will be paid by the warehouses. Bailey said that industry would pay; the only exemptions may be for public lands. Bailey said that discussions are still underway.

Her main point is that she's trying to spread the word that there IS a levy system, and that it's in need of repair. People may be affected in ways they don't realize – going to jobs in the flood plain, Costco's in the flood plain, as is the airport.

The group thanked Bailey for coming, but that it's probably too soon to come to the General Meeting in October. Mike suggested the spring meeting may be a more appropriate time. He felt that if she could get the community behind one of the options, that would be great. On the operating side, they'll likely have some idea in the May-June 2023 timeframe. But that's going to be a harder sell, since it may be a direct bill. It'll be in the ballpark of \$30 million, but for individuals it might be about a dollar a month – it's pretty small. The more individuals who are opted out, though, the more expensive it gets.

The decisions will be made by the board of this new drainage district – comprised of representatives of all the impacted cities (Gresham, Fairview, etc.), Multnomah County, Metro, the Port of Portland, there are business representatives, an environmental conservation agency, and a resident. It'll be a lot of work to get everyone to agree, but we're represented by a couple of different organizations.

If the work isn't done, the area's going to flood. We've already had areas flood, and the situation isn't getting better; modeling suggests rivers are going to rise earlier in the year and last longer, so the levies are going to have to sustain more water, longer, than what they were designed for. The federal government can also revoke its accreditation, which would make it very expensive to build in that area, plus existing companies would have to pay for expensive flood insurance. But there's really no question; the work has to be done.

If the funding goes through, it'll pay for the annual maintenance of the levy system. It'll also create some savings for future capital investments. One of the questions will be how much to set aside as a capital reserve. In the long term, there will be investments in pump houses, green technologies and property acquisition. The focus will be flood safety – how do we keep people from losing property during floods. The only new levy will be along the railroad embankment in the west, which is what contributed to the Vanport flooding.

The discussion turned to the upcoming General Meeting. It'll be at Eastrose again. Jason Branstetter from the City's water department will come to talk about the well house status. Mike would like the man in charge of the bike path program to come, since he's unhappy about the fact our area isn't slated for as much work as other areas. Mike suggested Lori Stegmann to talk about the drainage, but the group decided it would be better to have Bailey talk about it in the spring. A recycling person would be good, and Kim will see if she can round someone up. Another possibility would be a representative of the CVIP program, since they're recruiting right now. And of course there will be elections. Kim's going to step up to president, Mike is going to run for Vice President. Linda V., Linda P. and John will stay in their positions. We'll need a secretary as a result.

Mike added it's Steve Fancher from the bike path program, the other guy's name is Chris Strong, who's in charge of a traffic calming program.

We briefly spoke about disbanding the neighborhood association, and Mike said it'll depend on what this next meeting looks like – who shows up, what kind of support we have, etc. Linda V. asked about inviting Wilkes-East to the meeting, and Mike said we should probably touch base with Kris Freiermuth about it.

Mike moved we adjourn, Linda V. seconded, meeting adjourned at 7:10 PM. Next Board Meeting will be Monday, September 19, 6:00-7:00 PM at the Rockwood Village Condo Clubhouse, 18550 NE Wasco St. Portland Oregon, 97230