

Commercial Township
Special Meeting
March, 14 2024, at 6:00PM
Commercial Township Hall/Virtual

Mayor Sutton calls meeting to order.

Announcement that the special meeting has been advertised in two newspapers, South Jersey Times and Daily Journal, it is being electronically recorded, and being held in full compliance with the Open Public Meeting Act.

Flag Salute.

In Attendance:

Ronald Sutton Sr.	Mayor
Mike Vizzard	Committeeman
Meghan Wren	Guest Speaker
Heather Miller	Township Clerk
Robert Welch	Township OEM
Clint Miller	Public Works Supervisor
Nick DiCosmo	Township Engineer
Iris Burt	Rutgers University
Sarah Lipuma	FEMA
Douglas Whittiker	Cumberland County Engineer Officer
Alaina Gable	Cumberland County Planning
Tony Clock	Citizen
Brian Kempf	ZOOM
Dave Bushek	ZOOM

Meghan Wren-

- Touch base on August meeting that had questions that weren't answered with the DEP.
- Stated she was at a conference and was able to talk to some of the DEP representatives.
- Wants people that have questions for the DEP to get them in as soon as possible so we can get them answered.
- Wants a group to go up to Trenton to talk face to face because sometimes that gets things done quicker.
- Wants to communicate through e-mail so they can get a list of questions together.
- February 29th was the deadline for the BRIC applications to be in.
- Stated she did a site visit with Brian to East Point Light House, Maurice River Township, and Commercial Township.

The group saw that there were two people waiting in the Zoom waiting room and let them into the meeting. Brian Kempf introduces himself and begins to talk about the site visit with Meghan.

Brian Kempf-

- Noticed how complex the water is as you get down to Shellpile and Port Norris area and seeing where the sluice gates are and canals.
- Stated there are hot spots of flooding along the creeks and dikes that PSEG has along the water line.
- His understanding is much more nuance now that they have been there and seen what is going on.

Meghan-

- I think the last time we met we talked about the possibilities and the last one we talked about was bulkheading Biviale and Shellpile. I was concerned about what that was going to look like sense the water hits the property from both the land side and the water side. I think that as an alternative is less viable for the property. There is still a possibility to look at different alternatives.
- Talked about asking CDM Smith, planning to look at alternatives to review.

Brian Kempf- A lot of businesses (in Commercial Township) are used to the water. If there is high water, they already move their trucks out the way, and prepare. In an additional type of protection there might help with the infrastructure side. Another thing we discussed was the possibility of water structure that would help as a break water, like an oyster reef. We might be able to make the case with a little bit of engineering modeling, that would help break up wave action.

Meghan Wren- - If you look at the south levee inventory, it shows the road as a levee.

- It's not right where the river hits the bulkhead, but it's at the highest point.
- The other question is all the water that was sitting on the roads was from the rain that we have had, not the high tides. Things here do not drain quickly. I lost a car here at what used to be called Shell Road, that is now High Street. Drainage is part of the problem.

Clint Miller - It's when the river is so high in the river no matter what you have can't go. The water is just stacked up. Have you seen what happened last week? That had the potential to be massive but thank God it worked out. That's the problem with Shellpile, when it gets stacked up with water like that there is no way out. It was bad out there this passed week.

Brian Kempf- When you mention the last week the water got out, was the wind blowing in another direction?

Clint Miller – Yeah, it was a big blow out tide. We also had the wind blowing the opposite way too. We had a high tide that was over 8.5 feet.

Rob Welsh- It was a weekend that the events happened, Friday Night, Saturday, and Sunday.

Clint Miller- The whole road was under water.

Mike Vizzard – Meghan, there was something called the Poor Infrastructure Development Program from the DOT that is supposed to help municipalities rebuild bulkheads to make them safe. Is this something our engineer can look into? It looks to me like that's the direct route. I think that's something we need to do not only to protect the businesses but the town.

Nick DiCosmo- I haven't had a chance to look into the program yet, but Mike and Barney sent me links on it. It does say it is a Support Infrastructure Program, but I just have to look more into it.

Heather Miller makes Sarah host of the Zoom Meeting, and Sarah shows the map of the water ways in Commercial Township.

Sarah Gable- Here I have added from the project list to the spread sheet, and to the locations where they will be at.

Meghan Wren- This is essentially the project list that we have all talked about on the map. Where there is the teal color on the map, that is where the possibility of armoring the waterfront.

Mike Vizzard- Yes, that is where we want to rebuild everything.

The team goes over the map, and the color coding of all the projects in order importance and how to be rebuilt.

The team also talks about the levee that broke during the last storm.

The team talks over the map to see where and how/where they could put a bulkhead.

They talk about how they want to put a bulkhead around the waterfront, but most of the waterfront is privately owned. They have to get the residents on board with the idea of the bulkhead, and see what grants are available with the Township backing them up.

Brian Kempf- If the people that don't want to do the bulkhead in one area, we can see if we can just not do that area.

Mike Vizzard- If we are going to do this, and make port Norris resilient, we just have to do it. We can't keep spinning our wheels figuring out what the owners don't want to do. If we want to make it resilient, then we make it resilient.

Nick DiCosmo- I don't know of a mechanism to go around, and build this bulkhead around the properties, or even the funding. Is it as simple as getting them to sign something giving them a temporary construction easement?

Brian Kempf- Last year there was an application in a city of New York for a new bulkhead system, and they needed the easements to complete the project. They were able to get the funding without all the owners. It is possible.

Mike Vizzard- Why can't the township just offer the owners of that waterfront to give them a tax abatement? On account we are taking their property and making it resilient.

Nick DiCosmo- You might not even have to do the tax abatement, because you're doing the work.

The team talks about how the State of New Jersey talks about the problems down here, there is a huge disconnect between Maurice River and Commercial Township because they are two separate issues.

Alaina- I think you want to have at least one public outreach meeting and send a notice to all the residents on the waterfront. Instead of doing the redevelopment that is the 30 years, you would be able to do the 5-year rehabilitation which is a 5-year abatement. You could give the owners an abatement to help fix up their properties. I would start with rehab first, and then do redevelopment for specific properties.

The team talked about a grant that Commercial Township received for a Rehab Study but was thrown out when our former Mayor Donna passed away.

The team talks about the process to get things done in the phase projects with FEMA and how Grant/Funding works.

Mike Vizzard – The Township has to get the funding to make the town resilient.

Clint Miller- You can't come through this and have a week link. The application for November, can it say, "This is what we want to do, will you entertain (FEMA) so we can figure out how to the next stage?" Because I can tell you now, we don't have the money. You're saying we need to put down 10 percent? We don't have that.

Meghan Wren – That's part of the DTA, is to point to different places where maybe that could come from and bring some partners to the table. November is tight, we need to get this all figured out. I found out at the conference the University of PA is already engaged in this project and were one of the partners that worked in the mouth.

Mike Vizzard- Forget about the money, the taxpayers deserve to have a resilient property. We must get it done. We have to make every effort to get it to work.

Meghan- The more partners you have on the table, the more access you have to other creative ways to pull together.

Mike Vizzard- I think BRIC needs to stand up and help us with this and figure this out.

Meghan Wren- That is what we are here for, to get you a successful BRIC application is the goal of this process. That includes bringing partners to the table. There are already partners engaged in the Maurice River.

Clint Miller- So you're saying BRIC won't, even if we make this happen for November, we need to find that 10 percent match?

Meghan Wren- Well, some of the property investments can be considered a match.

Brian Kempf- Meghan and I are doing everything we are doing to make this the perfect package. We do know all the ins and out of the application so that when we had it off somebody is going to see it and say "I want to fund that." There is a very compelling story here about why this project is so needed, and how everyone is going to come together to do it. The 10 percent funding part, that is in Federal Law. We cannot change that or do anything about, but we can try to help and pull resources together to make that happen. We are doing everything we can do to put this into the perfect package.

The team talks about the applications, grant writing, and how to get more residents on board.

Meghan Wren- I know you guys don't want any more meetings, but we need one to touch on some points.

The next meeting will be April 1st at 2:00PM at Commercial Township Municipal with Maurice River Township.

Mayor Sutton asked if there were any public comments.

Mayor Sutton made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Committeeman Vizzard made the second motion to adjourn.

Respectfully Submitted,
Gabrielle Horseman, Deputy Clerk