



MECKLENBURG COUNTY
Land Use & Environmental Services Agency
Water & Land Resources

TO: Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners
FROM: W. Dave Canaan, Director
DATE: August 16, 2013
SUBJECT: August 6, 2013 Board of County Commissioners meeting

At the August 6, 2013 Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) meeting, staff was asked to follow-up on the following questions. These questions were raised at the conclusion of staff's presentation updating the BOCC on Storm Water Service's Response to the 2013 flood events.

Q1 (Commissioner Dunlap): How many properties in the floodplain are left to be acquired?

A1: There are approximately 5,000 buildings in the floodplain that have varying degrees of risk of flooding. However, there will be approximately 340 flood-prone properties remaining where acquisition and demolition are considered "highly effective" according to the County's Risk Assessment/Risk Reduction Plan, after the FY14 voluntary buyout program to acquire about 50 properties is implemented. This number may change over time as Storm Water Services updates flood maps or obtains additional risk information. As part of the FY15 budget process, staff will provide options for consideration as to Storm Water Service's future level of service (buyouts, elevations, etc.) and the associated impact on the storm water fee.

Q2 (Commissioner Leake): What can be done to help those who flooded and are concerned about health issues in the Stewart/Irwin Creek watershed?

A2: As was discussed at the BOCC meeting, storm water fee-based funding assistance to home owners to elevate HVAC, duct work, flood proofing crawl spaces etc. is currently prohibited by State Law. If N.C. Senate Bill 275 (Stormwater Management Fee Uses) is approved, it will provide an opportunity to reduce future flood losses through implementation of such a program, if supported by the BOCC.

As of this date, Storm Water Services has completed more than a half dozen projects in the Irwin/Stewart watershed, with eight more in the planning/design stages. The primary objective of these projects is to reduce street flooding. Projects undertaken by Storm Water Services are not intended to prevent creeks from overflowing into the floodplain during heavy rain – floodplains are meant to flood. So far, 59 high-risk homes in the Irwin/Stewart floodplain

have been purchased and removed to protect lives and property from flooding. Many of these homes would have flooded on July 11, 2013. In that watershed, 135 properties remain in the FEMA “no build zone.”

In addition, Storm Water Services has completed four stream restoration projects on Irwin and Stewart Creeks. Restoration projects are intended to improve water quality and reduce property loss due to erosion. Because urban streams carry a significant amount of water during heavy rain, projects to stabilize creek banks and restore stream beds usually do not reduce flooding. Storm Water Services will conduct a feasibility study to determine what effect stream restoration on two additional segments of Stewart Creek would have on water quality and aquatic habitat, as well as any ability to reduce flooding.

To understand the community’s priorities and improve communication, staff is working with neighborhood groups on a process to outline the residents’ desired end results and discuss specific actions that might be taken by various City and County agencies to achieve those results. The desired outcomes may appear to be obvious to some. But staff is concerned that some actions being requested by the community may not lead to desired outcomes. One example is the request to restore Stewart Creek similar to what Storm Water Services has done to portions of Little Sugar Creek. It is a misconception that Storm Water has solved the flooding problems of Little Sugar Creek by a couple of stream restoration projects. If the issue or interest is to protect public health by stopping flooding in or under someone’s home, restoring Stewart Creek will not address the root problem or provide the desired end result.

Staff is talking to the Historic West End Neighborhood Association (HWENA), Stewart Creek Environmental Association (SCEA) and others to see if there is a desire to participate in this type of dialogue. The result may be a comprehensive list of capital projects to be completed in the watershed in coming years by various public entities focusing on the mutually agreed to interests. As part of this effort, agencies would communicate the intended outcomes of each project such as reduced flooding or improved water quality in the stream. Equally important is communicating what community interest each project would not be able to completely address.

Q3 (Tammy Hill - President, SCEA): How much will it cost to obtain a Capital Investment Project to restore natural life back to Stewart Creek?

A3: The average cost to restore a stream like Stewart Creek is \$1 million per mile. Staff is starting to look at the feasibility of potential stream restoration project(s) in Stewart Creek. However, it is recommended the above process of having a broader discussion of the community’s interests take place before a stream restoration project is considered for funding.

Q4 (Tammy Hill - President, SCEA): Who is responsible for the health of creeks within Mecklenburg County? City, County or State?

A4: It depends on the location of the watershed, but in general the City is responsible for water quality in streams within the City and the County is responsible for watersheds outside the City limits. However, the City and County frequently partner on projects to improve water quality and enhance habitat.

Q5 (Tammy Hill - President, SCEA): Has Stewart Creek in its entirety ever been cleaned? If yes, what was the date?

A5: In the summer of 2012, a few blockages (debris and woody growth) were found and removed from Stewart Creek. After the July 11, 2013 flood, Storm Water Services staff walked the stream and found it open for the most part. The few blockages found will be removed the week of August 12, 2013. It is important to note that, to prevent erosion, protect water quality and improve habitat, the County stopped clear-cutting vegetation from the banks of local streams in the late 1990s. However, there are opportunities for the public to remove litter and other debris through volunteering in the annual Big Sweep event (to be held on September 28, 2013) and year round through the Adopt-A-Stream program. Both of these are managed locally by Storm Water Services and there has been recent interest expressed by Mr. Ronald Ross and Ms. Tammy Hill to help in this year's Big Sweep event.

Q6 (Tammy Hill - President, SCEA): Was there measures taken to remove the sewage from the July 12, 2013 flood on Stewart Creek?

A6: Storm Water Services was notified by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utilities Department (CMUD) that a sewer overflow occurred on Blackmon Street upstream of Stewart Creek Trib. 2. The overflow was due to a surcharge in the sewer line from the heavy rainfall. CMUD reports they responded within an hour of being notified. Approximately 7,150 gallons reached Stewart Creek Trib. 2. Appropriate steps were taken to remove the blockage and clean the area, and no dead fish were found as a result of the overflow. Other than that instance, there were no other activities taken to remove sewage from the floodwaters.

Floodwater is often contaminated or polluted with bacteria from a number of sources such as sewer overflows, leaking or failing septic systems, and animal waste among others. It is the responsibility of the property owner to properly cleanup after a flood. The City and County have limited ability to assist a flood victim with cleaning or removing their personal property. Mecklenburg County's Storm Water staff will lead a discussion among various City and County agencies to better communicate what flood victims should do to protect health and safety after a flood and what resources are available (Red Cross, Health Department, Hands on Charlotte, faith community, etc.). Eliminating pollutants from flood waters is impossible in an urban environment like Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

Q7 (Tammy Hill - President, SCEA): Has air quality testing occurred since the July 12, 2013 flood? If yes, what were the results? If no, why was no testing completed and when can we expect testing to occur, along with receipt of testing results.

A7: Mecklenburg County has not performed any air quality testing. The Environmental Health program does not have any responsibility or authority to perform these type tests nor have the ability to regulate ambient air quality. Environmental Health's regulatory authority for buildings is limited to specific public facilities - i.e. restaurants, hotels, meat markets, schools, child care centers, etc., and to wells and septic tank systems that may serve them. Environmental Health does not have authority to address mold/mildew issues associated with flooding of private residences or even in apartments or other lodging situations were rental is for a period of 1 week or longer. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has an extensive amount of information that can be found at: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/> or by calling 800-CDC-INFO (or 800-232-4636).

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (704) 336-3736 or at dave.canaan@mecklenburgcountync.gov if there are any questions.

CC: Speakers: Ms. Maria Hill, Mr. Aaron McKeithan, Ms. Tammy Hill, Mr. Ronald Ross, Mr. Hoyle Martin, Mr. Harris and Ms. Betty Marlin
Bobbie Shields, Interim County Manager
Leslie Johnson, Interim Assistant County Manager