

Approved Minutes for the Combined Community Meeting, August 1, 2012

Attendees: Robert Tomey, Carla Gaff-Clark, Brad Barcom, Cathy Hurt
The meeting was called to order at 7:30pm.

Rocky Ripple Town Board comments

The Rocky Ripple town board started the meeting with the following comments.

Regarding the fact that Rocky Ripple residents could be “sandbagged in” and trapped during a high water event, Carla noted that by the time the city of Indianapolis would be sandbagging the bridges, most of Rocky Ripple would probably be under water and people would already have evacuated.

Also, regarding the cost estimate to include Rocky Ripple in flood protection, Carla noted that the estimate only includes the cost to replace septic systems that would be disrupted by the floodwall. The estimate does not include the cost to provide sewers for all residents of Rocky Ripple.

Robert stated that Rocky Ripple has been trying to be re-included in a flood protection plan since 2001. In 2004 Julia Carson allocated money for this, but the money was redirected after hurricane Katrina. Rocky Ripple’s main objective is flood protection in a timely fashion.

Robert noted that the new study from the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is essentially the original one from 1996 with updated cost estimates. He further noted that Rocky Ripple is now estimated to have 7 year flood protection.

The city of Indianapolis and the USACE have separate options, but there are really only two viable ones. One would be to extend the floodwall from the Riviera club up 56th Street, ending somewhere around Illinois Street. The other would be the “canal wall”, extending along Westfield Blvd. between the canal and the road. Both would have floodgates that would be closed during a flood. The city of Indianapolis has the money to do one of these options today. The Department of Public Works (DPW) has stated that Rocky Ripple will not be included. They say that they have an alternate plan to help Rocky Ripple, but no details have been discussed. There is nothing in writing.

In 2008 David Sherman, the head of the DPW, stated that Indianapolis will not spend a dime on an independent community. Rocky Ripple is allocated \$15,000 by the city for services, including fire protection, garbage pickup, and some police services. The remainder will not be enough to provide any meaningful flood protection.

Brad noted that the main argument against including Rocky Ripple is cost. A figure of \$54 million was put forth by the USACE, but it was not itemized.

The city of Indianapolis had a meeting to address our concerns but the USACE was not present and the city could not answer “hard questions”.

Brad also noted that the city has made claims in the past regarding flood protection for Rocky Ripple, but has never made good on them. We should not believe any proposals unless they are in writing. Robert agreed, adding that we have never gotten a written proposal from the city.

Meeting attendee comments

Regarding the floodgates, is it true that residents will get 24 hour notice before they are closed? Will notice go door to door? How will they ensure that all residents are notified so no one is trapped?

Yes, it is true, and in addition they will sandbag the bridges at 52nd and 53rd Streets. The USACE will need to have a concrete, detailed, written proposal for the evacuation of Rocky Ripple. In fact, they should have a draft now and we should be able to see it.

Town of Rocky Ripple, 930 West 54th Street, Rocky Ripple, Indiana

It was stated that the 1996 decision by Rocky Ripple to reject the river wall was not an informed decision. We were not informed that we would be sealed off if we said no.

Julie Bleakley stated that she was in the group that passed out the orange flyers. The group has contacted reporters and officials and they are not informed about this issue. We need to tell them! They can't help us if they don't know we need help. Please call and write letters! Information is in the flyer.

It was stated that flyers were removed from mailboxes- not everyone got one.

It was asked what leverage Rocky Ripple has?

It is true that we don't have much leverage with the USACE, but we are voters and we have leverage with our elected officials.

We need a good PR campaign. We are preaching to the choir at this meeting. We should have our representatives here.

Robert stated that our representatives were invited but did not respond to the invitations.

It was stated that the representatives didn't get enough notice. Robert stated that the timeframe was short, but that "not enough notice" is a cop-out on the part of our representatives. He further stated that starting a PR campaign is one of the outcomes we want from this meeting.

There will be a public hearing chaired by Col. Luke Leonard of USACE at Meridian Street United Methodist Church, 5500 N. Meridian, on Thursday, Aug. 23, 5pm.

It was asked if the fact that Rocky Ripple needs sewers was held against us in the flood protection project. Carla stated no, that they two are separate projects. Brad stated that the documents are not clear, and since the cost of the flood project was not itemized we don't really know.

"What politician wants to be the one in charge of the next 9th Ward?"

We need to think outside the box. Phone calls and emails only go so far. We need to reach out to the media. We offer Indianapolis a lot more than just property taxes.

It was stated that we are in a floodway and that FEMA is pretty particular regarding who they will insure. Anyone with a mortgage is required to have flood insurance. We are insurable now, but when the wall is built FEMA will drop us. How will we afford flood insurance?

It was stated that if Rocky Ripple is sealed in and floods it will be hazardous to Indianapolis drinking water, as our septic waste will flow into the canal.

Robert replied that he has talked to the water company about this and they have indicated that they are not concerned. They say that they will be able to treat the water.

Regarding FEMA, Robert stated that if we flood and 41% of the homes in town are damaged FEMA can make everyone move. There are several examples where this has happened in Indiana.

Robert reiterated that one of the reasons for this meeting was to start making some noise as a community and to give the board ideas. The board can't do this alone.

A thank you was given to the board and community volunteers for all the work they do.

It was stated that the USACE based their proposal on Katrina, and that doesn't apply to Rocky Ripple. We don't need that level of protection.

Residents need to write letters to the USACE during the comment period. They count numbers of letters.

The idea to sandbag one of our bridges as a demonstration was proposed.

The city of Indianapolis is already reworking parts of the Wharfleigh project so it can meet post Katrina standards. It still might not- FEMA must certify the project and there is no guarantee that they will do so. If the project is not certified, people will still be required to carry flood insurance. We need to emphasize this!

It was stated that the Board should demand to see the USACE evacuation plan.
Brad said not to rely on the board- citizens need to drive this! The board is only three people and can only make so much noise.

What is the timeline for the flood project? The comment period runs until Aug. 31. The USACE hearing will be several days after that.

As a last resort, we can file an injunction against the city of Indianapolis. They have issued building permits allowing people to build into the levee and have stopped citizens from doing their own work to shore up the levee.

It was noted that we are sitting on valuable real estate. If we are condemned a private developer can come in and build a high-rise walled community. Right now we don't pay enough in property taxes to be worth a levee project.

It was noted that the Waterworks board was responsible for levee maintenance, but when they disbanded no one took over.

The best way to be heard is to write letters! Don't go home and assume that someone else will do it.

Should we start proceedings on the injunction now?
No- we can't start until a decision is made.

We need the press! We need to start a Save Rocky Ripple campaign.
Robert is having a banner made.

We need to go viral on the internet.
Sandbagging the bridge was a good idea.

It was decided to meet Saturday, Aug. 11, 10am, at the 52nd Street bridge to demonstrate. Kate Bullis offered to head the effort. She can be contacted at KWB1425@gmail.com or 309-371-8040. The more people that participate the more impact we will have. The whole town should be there!

What if every homeowner refused to pay property taxes?
Let's try sandbags before revolution.

It was asked whether we need to get consensus from the community before we start demonstrating. We don't want to tear ourselves apart.
Carla responded that as the result of a town meeting regarding the USACE project (Feb. 24, 2011), the board has resolved to support flood protection in Rocky Ripple. The community is mostly "pro river-wall". It is not a contentious issue like it was in 1996.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45pm

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Hurt