

Approved Minutes for the Combined Community Meeting, Feb. 28, 2011

This meeting was called to get neighborhood opinions regarding the Army Corps of Engineers “Indianapolis, White River (North), Flood Damage Reduction Project, Phase 3B”. The Environmental assessment for this project has just been released.

Presiding:

Neil Bloede, president of the Butler Tarkington Neighborhood Association (BTNA)

Robert Tomey, president of the Rocky Ripple Town Council

Carla Gaff-Clark, chairperson of the Rocky Ripple Town Council

Angela Herrmann, communications coordinator for the Rocky Ripple Town Council

Cathy Hurt, clerk-treasurer for the Town of Rocky Ripple

The meeting was called to order at 7:40pm. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Welcome

William Rhodehamel, General Manager & Chief Operating Officer of the Riviera Club, welcomed everyone and gave a brief overview of the club. The Riviera Club has been part of the community for almost 80 years. It is a welcoming community dedicated to health and fitness. It is a private club. If you are not a member yet, consider joining the Rivi family.

Neil, Robert, Carla, Angela, and Cathy were introduced and the Rules of Engagement were explained.

Project Update

Neil described the project, which will be called the “canal wall” in these minutes. The wall will run along Westfield Blvd between the street and the canal. There will be a floodgate across the canal at Capital Ave and the wall will end on Butler University property. The wall would be up to six feet high. Trees would be cleared on either side of the wall for fifteen feet.

The environmental assessment was released Feb. 1, 2011. BTNA learned about the updated project about two and a half weeks ago.

Robert stated that Rocky Ripple had a special town meeting regarding this project on Feb. 24. The town hall was at capacity, and there was no opposition to being included in a plan such as the last version of the 1996 US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) plan (called the “river wall” in these minutes).

Rocky Ripple did opt out of the 1996 plan, but the town did not opt out of flood protection. The river has changed in the intervening time- high water events are more frequent and higher. Also, homes have been improved and are worth more. The town requested to be included in a river wall type flood protection plan in 2001, and again in 2004. In 2005, a line item was included in the budget for environmental study, but any money for levee work that year was diverted to New Orleans after Katrina.

He thanked the Indianapolis Department of Public Works (DPW) for assisting Rocky Ripple with sandbagging during high water events.

Recently, a large tree on the levee behind the Town Hall fell and created a large hole in the levee. The town was able to repair it, but this will happen again.

The Rocky Ripple town council is unanimous in wanting flood protection for the town.

Neil stated that once Rocky Ripple expressed desire to be included in the flood protection plan, Rocky Ripple and the BTNA approached the DPW and asked that the comment period for this project be extended. The DPW agreed, and sent a letter to the USACE asking that the comment period be extended to 90 days. Rocky Ripple and the BTNA will send a joint letter to the USACE asking for a re-evaluation of the plan and that alternatives that will include Rocky Ripple in a flood protection plan be explored.

Official Responses

David Sherman, Director, Indianapolis Department of Public Works (DPW)

Mr. Sherman presented a slide from Rebuild Indy, listing the project benefits, as follows:

- Removal of approximately 2400 properties from the flood plain
- Protect area from catastrophic flooding
- Installation of in-river flood warning system
- Integration into flood works safeguards major drinking water supply
- Completion of environmental mitigation

So far, about 30 million dollars have been spent building the levee that now stretches from Broad Ripple to Kessler Blvd. If the third phase is not completed, people will get no relief from flood insurance. The project was started by the USACE in 1991. In 1996, Rocky Ripple opted out. In 2001 and 2004, Rocky Ripple asked to be reinstated. The city declined.

The DPW has written to the USACE and asked that the comment period for Phase 3B be extended to 90 days.

This meeting is for citizen feedback. The DPW wants to get as many people out of the flood plain as possible. Adding Rocky Ripple makes sense. The DPW is open to discussion. They want to make this right.

Mr. Sherman noted that if the wall is moved, people with homes on the river may have the same response as we are now hearing from the people with homes on the canal.

Angela Herrman, Communications Coordinator, Rocky Ripple Town Council

The town of Rocky Ripple first heard about the latest plans for the canal wall on Feb. 8. A town meeting was called on Feb. 24. At that meeting the town council passed a resolution calling for increased time for public comment (90 days was suggested), to stop the canal wall, and to seek flood protection for the town of Rocky Ripple.

Ms. Herrmann thanked the DPW for submitting the letter regarding increased comment time to the USACE.

She noted that many of the people who now live in Rocky Ripple did not live there in 1996.

Neil Bloede, President, Butler Tarkington Neighborhood Association (BTNA)

After gathering feedback from neighbors, the BTNA passed a resolution requesting more time for public comment, rejecting the canal wall, and supporting a flood protection design that includes Rocky Ripple. There is inherent value in a plan that protects as many people as possible. He expressed concern that a high water event would catastrophically damage Rocky Ripple.

The plan could be designed to protect Rocky Ripple. It should be re-evaluated; it is 15 years old. As is, the wall would cut off use and enjoyment of the historic canal.

The canal is a gem of Indy. People go there to run, bike, jog, and fish. It is a unique setting in an urban environment. The wall and the 30 foot swath stripped of trees would make it much less desirable. This would decrease foot traffic, which would have an economic impact to businesses at the corner of 56th and Westfield.

Beyond aesthetics and concern for Rocky Ripple, the current plan would expose the canal to flood waters. The canal supplies 60% of the potable water for the city. Flood waters would contaminate our drinking water.

Robert Tomey, President, Rocky Ripple Town Council

Mr. Tomey stated that people want flood protection quickly. They built a huge stadium downtown in no time- surely they can amend the current flood protection plan in less than eight years.

Mary Owens, Land Use Director, Meridian Kessler Neighborhood Association

Ms. Owens did not have a statement. She was here to gather information.

Jerry Carlson, Director of Maintenance Services, Butler University

Mr. Carlson read the following letter from Michael Gardner, Butler's Vice President of Operations, to the USACE.

"Feb. 28, 2011

Butler University is pleased to have been included in conversations with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers since 1996 on the White River levee project. We have appreciated the organization's candidness with us as they worked to find a solution that would prevent the White River from spilling into several neighborhoods during a 100 year flood, while also hearing the concerns of the University, Butler Tarkington Neighborhood Association (BTNA) and the Town of Rocky Ripple. Given the most recent concerns from both the BTNA and Rocky Ripple, regarding the latest plan to build a levee along the east side of the canal, the University respectfully asks that the Corps revisit the original 1996 plan.

The original plan is, without question, the most beneficial to Butler University for the long-term. It allows greater flexibility for future land use, as it would pull all of our acreage on the west side of the canal, as well as the Holcomb Gardens, out of the flood plain.

Due to my departure from Butler University on March 4th, Rich Michal, our Facilities Engineer, will be the University's contact for future discussions on this project. He can be reached at rmichal@butler.edu.

Thank you for your consideration of this request."

Kathy Shorter, President, HARMONI

HARMONI is an initiative dedicated to enhancing Historic Midtown's sense of place and district identification to keep it beautiful, walkable, bikeable, and sustainable. They fully support the BTNA's resolution.

Tony Nicholas, Treasurer, Riviera Club Board of Directors

The DPW and USACE have been forthcoming about their plans, thank you. The concerns of the Riviera club are like everyone else's- the club will lose property including tennis courts and a playground. The club's operation will be disrupted by the construction. They support the current design, but would support a re-design. They would like flood protection in a timely manner.

Megan Sims, Office of Congressman Andre Carson

Ms. Sims did not have a statement, she is here to listen to neighborhood concerns on behalf of Congressman Carson.

Citizen Responses

Bart Herriman, Rocky Ripple resident, lives on river

A river wall will affect his relationship with the river, but cares about the safety of Rocky Ripple override that. Wants river wall.

Dennis Faulkenberg, Butler Tarkington resident, lives on canal

Lives by where gate will be installed over the canal. Found out about the canal wall only because he saw surveyors and did some research.

- Hundreds of trees would be taken to build the canal wall.
- The intrusive wall would divide the community.
- The gate would be fenced and topped with barbed wire due to homeland security issues.
- The wall will disrupt the historic canal and wall off Rocky Ripple from flood protection.

- There was not adequate public notice- he was told that this latest version of the plan was a minor change and because he was on the other side of the canal he did not need to be notified. Does not see how the USACE can call the latest plan a minor change.
- The canal supplies drinking water to 60% of the city. It is vital. The current plan leaves it vulnerable to contaminated flood waters.
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) guidelines section 4F requires that parkland property be avoided. The historic Central Canal Towpath is an urban park.
- Thank you to the DPW for listening. Please don't just listen! Please act!

Zach Cattell, Rocky Ripple resident, lives on river

Noted that this was an interesting day to be discussing this, as we are in the midst of a high water event. Don't cut off flood protection for the 325 homes in Rocky Ripple! (Carla Gaff-Clark noted that there are 331 homes and more than 700 people in Rocky Ripple.) The 1996 plan is acceptable. This plan called for a two to five foot wall on the river side of the existing levee.

Yes In My Back Yard!

Thanks to the BTNA, Rocky Ripple board, and the DPW

Jon Mills, Warfleigh resident, Communications Director for mayoral candidate Melina Kennedy

Agrees with previous statements.

Ms. Kennedy issued this statement Feb. 25:

"I strongly support Rocky Ripple and believe the Mayor should intervene immediately to stop this proposal from advancing until there is further review and discussion.

Rocky Ripple and other affected neighborhood residents should be included in the flood protection plan discussion. I was concerned to hear this plan was put forth without community input.

The proposed wall will have far reaching effects, well beyond the neighborhood of Rocky Ripple. Residents from other adjacent neighborhoods share the belief that that the revised plan by the City of Indianapolis and Army Corps could have devastating effects including endangering residents and subjecting their homes to damage during high water incidents.

At a time when Mayor Ballard is publicly speaking about his plans to improve our City's neighborhoods and create attractive urban settings, his office supports a harmful neighborhood plan. Not only would this proposed plan hurt Rocky Ripple, Butler Tarkington and other neighborhoods, but it will negatively impact the many Indianapolis residents who utilize the canal for exercise and leisure, as well adversely affect the aesthetics of the area.

Instead of simply talking about improving neighborhoods, the Mayor should start by protecting a notable feature of the City's landscape and involving neighbors in the discussions that will affect them. I support Rocky Ripple and call on the Mayor to immediately intervene and put a stop to the current proposal."

Dennis Carr

Thank you to the Riviera club for letting us use their facility and to the DPW. Mr. Sherman said that the DPW will do what they can to make this right- we will hold them to it. The discussion on whether to include Rocky Ripple took place a long time ago and needs to be revisited. The DPW needs to keep people informed.

Connie Henn, Butler Tarkington resident, lives "up the hill"

Agrees with previous speakers. Loves the historic canal. Rocky Ripple should have been allowed to be reinstated.

A member of the audience asked what are the changes from the "old plan" to the current one?

Mr. Sherman answered that the 1996 plan proposed a wall along the river. Rocky Ripple opted out. In 2001, some residents in the town asked to be reinstated in the plan, but the request wasn't taken into consideration because it was not an official petition from the town council. In 2004, the Rocky Ripple

town council did submit a formal request, but by that time the project was moving forward and the USACE did not want to delay it.

Arnie Lewin, lives on Westfield Blvd

Lives in an incredible neighborhood, great people, great eco-system. Regularly sees herons, bald eagles, and pileated woodpeckers. The canal wall would destroy their habitat.

The DPW has not been transparent until now. They need to listen to us.

Not In My Front Yard!

Bill Scott

Representing people who love to walk in Indy. There has been a lack of communication from the DPW.

Wants walkways taken into account whether the final plan is a canal wall or a river wall.

Al Mastain, Rocky Ripple resident

In 2014 we are going to get sewers put in with a pumping station on the canal. If the canal wall is built and Rocky Ripple floods, sewage will contaminate our drinking water.

Steve Nielson, Deputy Director, Drainage and Sanitary, DPW responded that sewers are watertight by design and that the lift station would be built up out of the flood plain. Septic tanks, however, could present the problem that Mr. Mastain described.

Julie Bleakley, Rocky Ripple resident

Being on the wrong side of the wall would hurt property values in Rocky Ripple.

Brody Goodwine, Warfleigh resident

Does not care which version of the plan is used but does not want a long delay. The delay costs him in flood insurance payments. If Rocky Ripple were added, would the town cooperate with the possible taking of private property?

Robert responded that the Town of Rocky Ripple wants the river wall and would help expedite the plan any way it could. Carla noted that the USACE never said that the flood walls would eliminate the need for flood insurance.

Mike Smith, Rocky Ripple resident

Wants the river wall. Noted that the canal wall plan would leave the canal, a source of drinking water, unprotected from contaminated flood water. There are elderly people in Rocky Ripple, the canal wall might slow emergency response time in general and in a flood event specifically. Rocky Ripple property values would be adversely affected by the canal wall.

Mary Walker, Butler Tarkington resident, lives "uphill"

As a walker and trail monitor, the canal path is personal to her. Already, the presence of algae in the canal has proven to be hard to treat and flood water would be a far worse contamination. In 1991 a tree fell and breached the canal. If the canal is exposed to floodwaters there is a potential for other incidents of that sort.

Dave Bond

Uses the river. The ghosts of indecision from the past have been laid at the feet of the city- this is not entirely fair. Thank you to the DPW for listening. There has been significant development and paving upstream on the White River since 1996 and this has led to the river rising very fast in heavy rain events.

Cindy Noe, Indiana State Representative

Encourages everyone to contact their state representatives. Her e-mail address is H87@IN.gov.

Representative Ed DeLaney's address is H86@IN.gov. Residents should also contact their city/county councilors. Although an extension of the comment period has been requested, the deadline is March 4 at present, so don't wait. The squeaky wheel gets the grease.

Greg Goodrich, Rocky Ripple resident

Was on the Rocky Ripple board in 2004 when the request was made to be included in the flood protection project. Knows that the city has to commit as a sponsor. Can we get a commitment from the DPW?

David Sherman responded that the DPW's mission is to get this right and that the DPW would ask the USACE to include Rocky Ripple in the flood protection project.

Carla Gaff-Clark, Rocky Ripple board member and resident, lives on river

This project will end up in someone's back yard. We have not heard dissenting opinions so far. If you are against the river wall, now is the time to speak up.

Audience member who owns two properties in Warfleigh

Wants to be out of the floodplain. The canal wall is a "shovel ready" project.

Closing Comments

Neil stated that this is not a political issue, this is about public safety. He thanked the DPW again for their willingness to help and thanked the Riviera Club for letting us use their facility.

Comments from residents need to be on record by March 4th. We have asked for an extension to the comment period but it has not been granted yet. There is a petition that people can sign.

A website has been set up at IndyFloodProtectionPartnership.info for more information, including contact information and a link to the petition.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Hurt