

## Notes from Comprehensive Plan Committee - Meeting #4 March 22, 2023

**Present:**

X	Garret Barry, Public Works	X	John Kostek, Recreation Committee
X	Mike Bartlett, Community Preservation Committee		Luke Longstreeth, Conservation Commission
X	Rebecca Bench, School Committee	X	John Pease, Agricultural Commission
X	Angelica Dewey, Open Space Committee*	X	Shawn Robinson, Council on Aging
	Julia Frisby, At Large		Micki Sanderson, Historical Commission
X	Jahlil Johnson, At Large	X	Stephanie Slysz, Planning Board
X	David Keir, At Large	X	Christopher Smith, Redevelopment Committee

Also attending: Marlene Michonski, Town Administrator; Andrew Smith, EEA – Greater Connecticut River Valley Region MVP Coordinator; Rich Niles, Joe Kirby\*, and Carly Quinn\*, Woodard & Curran; Nate Lash, Consensus Building Institute\*; Ken Comia and Patty Gambarini, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.

*\* = attended meeting through video link rather than in person*

**Next steps:**

- Marlene to check with Town Clerk on whether can hand out flyers related to community engagement event and survey at polls during election day.
- Patty to prepare flyer that includes all upcoming engagement events.
- Patty to check on prices for magnets, lawn signs, and banners.
- Rich and Joe to add Capawonk Living facility in Cross Section #1.

Topics for further discussion (possibly within subcommittees):

From February meeting:

- Creating location for people to send questions, messages on the project web page.
- Engaging students with Health and Social Environment chapter and bringing students more fully into the project fold (see yellow highlights below).

From March meeting:

- Outreach for public engagement.

**Discussion notes:**

Welcome and introductions

Marlene welcomed everyone at 6:10 and invited a round robin of introductions.

Meeting #3 approval of notes

Shawn asked for a motion to approve the February 22 meeting notes.

VOTE: Motion by Stephanie to approve the February 22 meeting notes, seconded by David, there being no discussion, the meeting notes were unanimously approved.

Logo

Ken presented the updated logo noting that the biggest changes based on February meeting recommendations are: removal of tobacco barn, and addition of tractor, trees, and a balloon.



Stephanie invited feedback. Comments included:

- Only drawback is that we don't see the river. But we do see the trees. Very nice, the church, the town hall. Like the silhouette.
- Hot air balloon seems a bit large.
- "Prosper" should come before "protect" and "prepare." Without prospering, there are no funds to protect and prepare.
- Given that we are looking toward 2040, we are really looking forward and planning and protection is the number one most important element for the future. Maybe prepare should go first? Prosper comes if we can take care of these two other essential things first...then we will prosper.

Shawn said the hope is to approve this logo tonight so that we can move forward with other important work of the committee. I think we can agree that we like it he noted. He then called for a vote.

VOTE: Motion by David to approve the logo, seconded by Stephanie, there being no further discussion, there was unanimous approval.

### Web page

Ken noted that the just approved logo will now be loaded to the project web page. He walked through each web page describing content and said that agendas, presentations, and approved notes from the Comprehensive Plan Committee will be loaded to the web pages within the week.

Stephanie said it looks ready to launch. Marlene observed that it looks good.

There was no further discussion.

### Remaining Year 1 Committee Meetings

Shawn indicated that everyone should have the flyer with the outlines of remaining Year 1 committee meetings.

Patty then walked through outlines for both the upcoming April 26 meeting and the May 24 meeting. The two meetings, she noted, are aimed at continuing to queue up content for the two large community-wide engagement events.

Members raised the following points:

*Opportunity provided by Town Meeting* - It will be important to engage people around Town meeting, with a flyer at the least. The Town Moderator has indicated that the public engagement sessions could be mentioned if they are related to another matter. If the survey is available that would be a good time to plug that too. People who go to Town Meeting are the ones who are invested in giving feedback.

*Election day* – Question was raised whether it is possible to hand out flyers around polls on election day as well. Marlene indicated she will check with the Town Clerk.

### Community Engagement Planning for Year 1

Nate walked through a series of 7 slides showing the community engagement approach for Year 1. The full set of slides is part of the meeting record.

He reviewed outlines for 5 elements:

- In-person listening sessions that are already under way;
- Public meeting #1, which will involve a virtual, recorded presentation and perhaps include some watch parties for those who may miss the real time virtual meeting;
- Public meeting #2 – in person, breakouts to get input from the public, share survey link; and
- Survey – What matters most to people

Nate noted that while the approach and sequence have been defined, the project team has not yet drilled down into the details on the public meetings and survey. He then invited thoughts and reactions to the outline. Members immediately asked two questions:

- Is the expectation for CPC members to be attending these events?
- How will these be advertised?

Patty said the hope is that CPC members will attend and even in some cases help to present information at these events.

Nate said there had already been some talk at this meeting about getting the word out, but additional suggestions are welcome. The following points were raised:

- The age-friendly listening sessions have been advertised through the COA newsletter and Facebook
- “Age friendly” is a bizarre name
- People can also be offended by being called a “senior”
- I’m a senior and I’m okay with that
  
- The 350<sup>th</sup> Committee did all promotion through FB and missed lots of people who do not do FB
- Ideally CPC members will bring this news of events back to their respective committees to help spread the word
- Marketing, outreach to get word out would be good
- Democracy comes from where you least expect it. Not so much from those of us in the room. It is important to get beyond the 200 that typically have show up.
  
- Get Gazette here to cover the associated stories, especially student work
- The Cooler Communities school event is on May 4
- Student engagement is a good opportunity to bring in members of this committee
- How do we get students to understand? Maybe role playing with disaster?
- We need to be careful about how we talk with young people about it. Maybe can talk about how they can be part of a solution?
  
- How do we keep this on the top of people’s minds? If we have budget, something like refrigerator magnets would be good.
- With any marketing, we need to think about communicating same information, whether it’s the web site, flyers, magnets. Spreading out our approaches will get wider engagement.
- Local signage that we drive past every day could be good. Get people to go to website and check it out.
- Could see a sign at Honeypot, where lots of people pass through.
- Lawns signs, especially after the election would be well timed.
- A pop-up tent outside of Town Hall where we distribute flyers and lawn signs
- Use social media

In the course of brainstorming, Stephanie mentioned twice that it would be important to establish a subcommittee to prepare an outreach strategy.

Patty will look into pricing for suggested outreach items. She also noted that anything created for a flyer could be adapted for social media and cable access as well.


## Flood Depth Cross Sections

Rich provided an overview and then built upon where he left off at the February meeting to talk about the cross sections. He reminded committee members that the key is to look at critical areas, using the FEMA remapping and future considerations to understand the extent to which flood depths are changing.

This will help frame some things for comparison so that we can look at relative risk and then think about adaptation strategies.

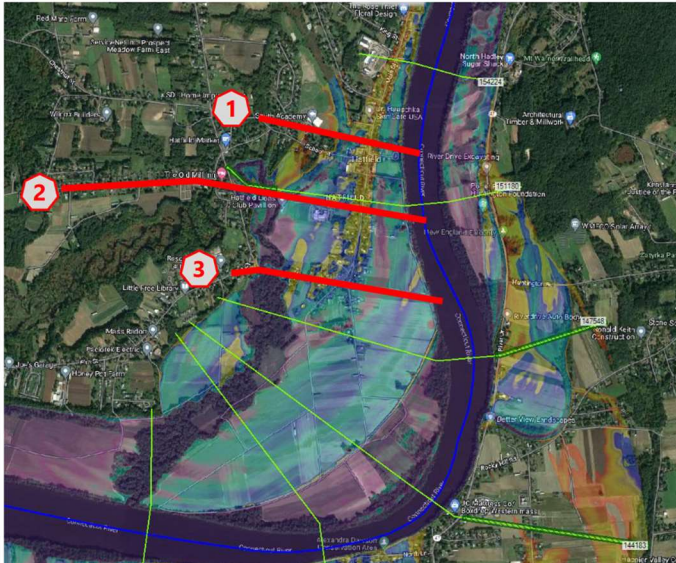
Cross sections were done at three locations (as shown in slide below). The full set of slides is provided as part of the meeting record.

## CPC Review of Project Work



► Cross-sections for critical areas based on prior CPC input:

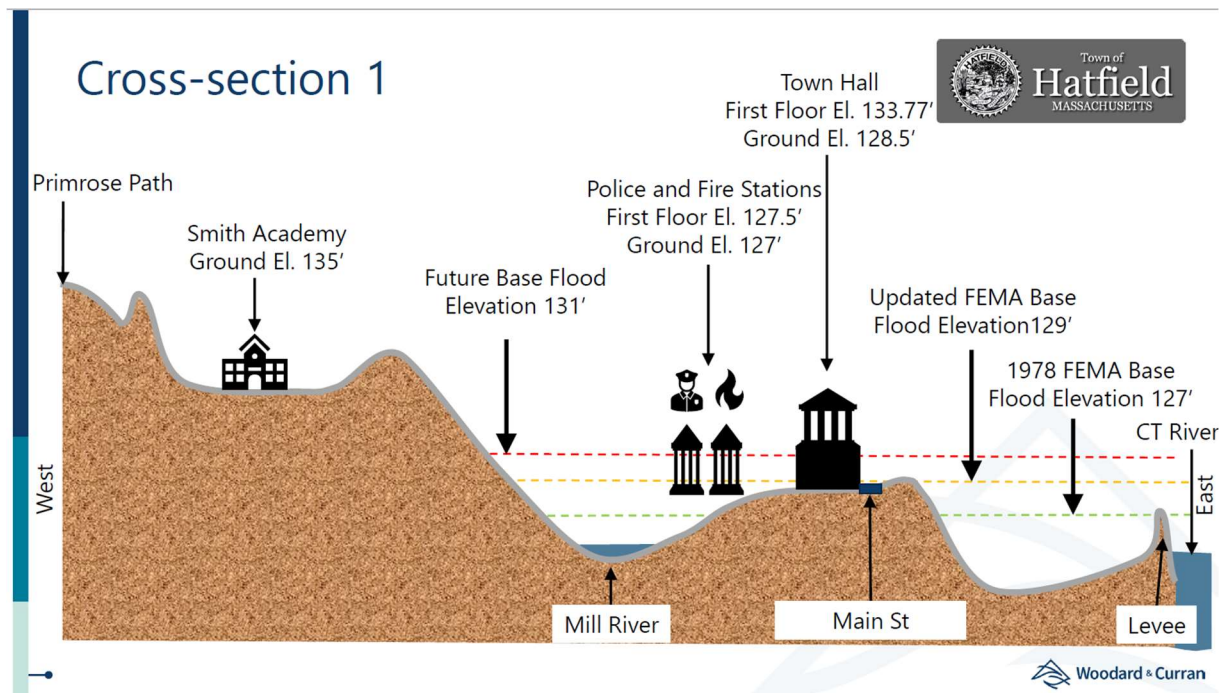
1. Chestnut St to School St to Town Hall/Main St to Levee to CT River
2. Bridge St to Elementary School to Main St to Levee to CT River
3. Elm St to Maple St to Levee to CT River



Rich noted that while the cross sections appear somewhat cartoonish, they are calibrated to the data that is in the FEMA model. We focused on ground surface and first floor elevation.

He described the following from the first cross section:

- Cross Section #1 shows Chestnut Street to School Street to Town Hall/Main Street to the Levee and Connecticut River.
- It shows the 1978 FEMA Base Flood Elevation of 127 feet in the green line, the updated FEMA Base Flood Elevation of 129 feet in the yellow line, and the Future Base Flood Elevation of 131 feet in the red line.
- You can see that Smith Academy is high and dry though roads to get there may be inundated.
- Police and Fire Stations have first floor elevations of 127.5 feet while Town Hall has a first floor elevation of 133.77. The ground floor elevation at Town Hall though is at 128.5



Members raised the following points:

- David noted that Smith Academy does have backwater from Mill River that could impact the building. He also asked what is the normal elevation of the Connecticut River on an average day. Rich did not know the answer, but asked Joe to look it up if possible.
- Angelika noted that Capawonk, the senior living facility is about the same level as Town Hall and police and fire. There are so many seniors living there. Is there any way to include Capawonk in the cross section or talk about how it relates to Town Hall? She said these are the people who would need most assistance, could be most harmed. She noted too that the Council on Aging is in the basement of Town Hall.
- Rich said Capawonk could be regarded as a critical facility. He explained that they included facilities where they knew first floor elevations. And that is what the typical reference is because that is what is of interest to FEMA for insurance. Joe noted that water would be high enough at Town Hall to go into the basement windows.
- There was some discussion between David and Rich about the Fire Department flood levels and how operations would need to move should there be such a flood event. One possible location might be the olde water plant building that is at a higher elevation. This might be converted to a temporary EOC.
- Mike said he had specific knowledge of working with FEMA maps and described his efforts to re-survey in order to qualify for a no-interest equipment loan. He noted that FEMA had his property off by about 8 feet.
- Rich noted that what Mike got is an elevation certificate. He noted that there is a footprint on a map, but FEMA does not necessarily know your building's first floor elevation. The numbers we are working on here are close and they are not off by several feet.

## Town Hall



- First Floor = EL 133.8
- Projected Climate Change EL 131
- Updated FEMA BFE = EL 129
- 1978 FEMA BFE = EL 127

Real First Floor = EL 122 (Est)  
Offices in basement



## Fire Department



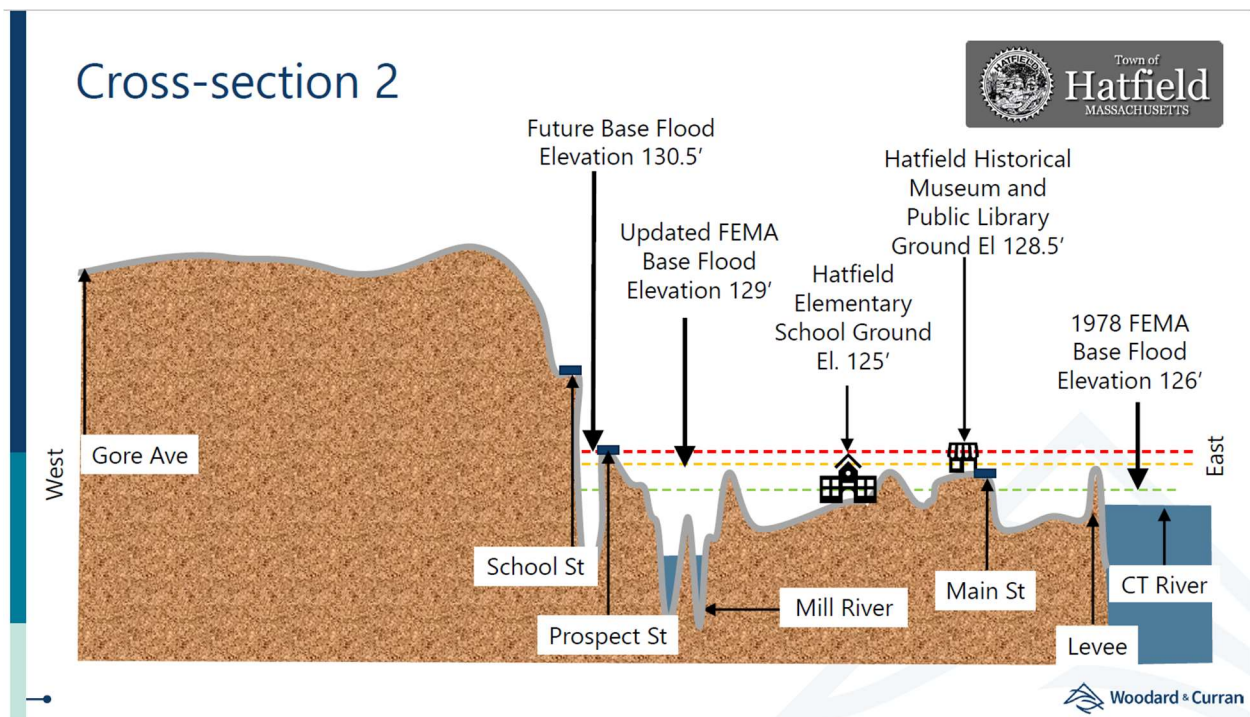
- Projected Climate Change EL 131
- Updated FEMA BFE = EL 129
- First Floor = EL 127.5
- 1978 FEMA BFE = EL 127



Rich described the following from the second cross section:

- Cross Section #2 shows Gore Avenue to School Street to the Mill River to the Hatfield Elementary School to the Historical Museum and Library to the levee and Connecticut River
- Given the elevations, we know already that with even the 1978 base flood elevation there was impact to the basements of the Historical Museum and Library and the Elementary School.
- It's important then to think about the extent of the impact when we are look at the updated base flood elevation and the projected climate change elevation.
- Also, remember that while these flood elevations are increased in some areas by 2 to 4 feet, flood waters do not spread too far into Town
- Unlikely that you are going to move these buildings so we are probably looking more at a flood proofing strategy as a short-term approach. Further study on the benefits and costs for building relocation should be conducted to consider a long-term approach if the Town wants to explore additional options.

Given the need to finish the presentation and meeting on time, Shawn asked that comments be held until Rich gets through his presentation.





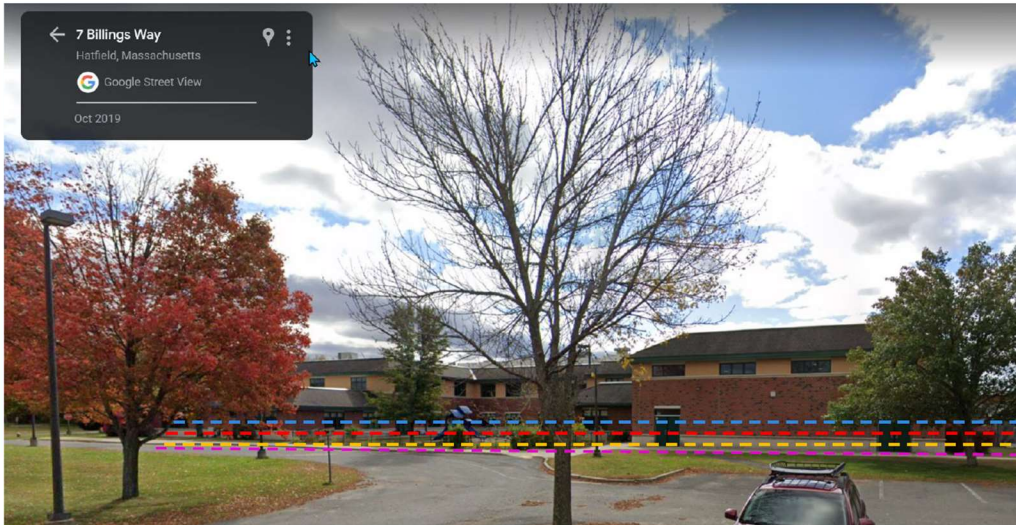
# Historical Museum and Library



Projected Climate Change, EL 130.5  
Updated FEMA BFE, EL 129  
First Floor EL 128.5  
1978 FEMA BFE = EL 126



# Hatfield Elementary



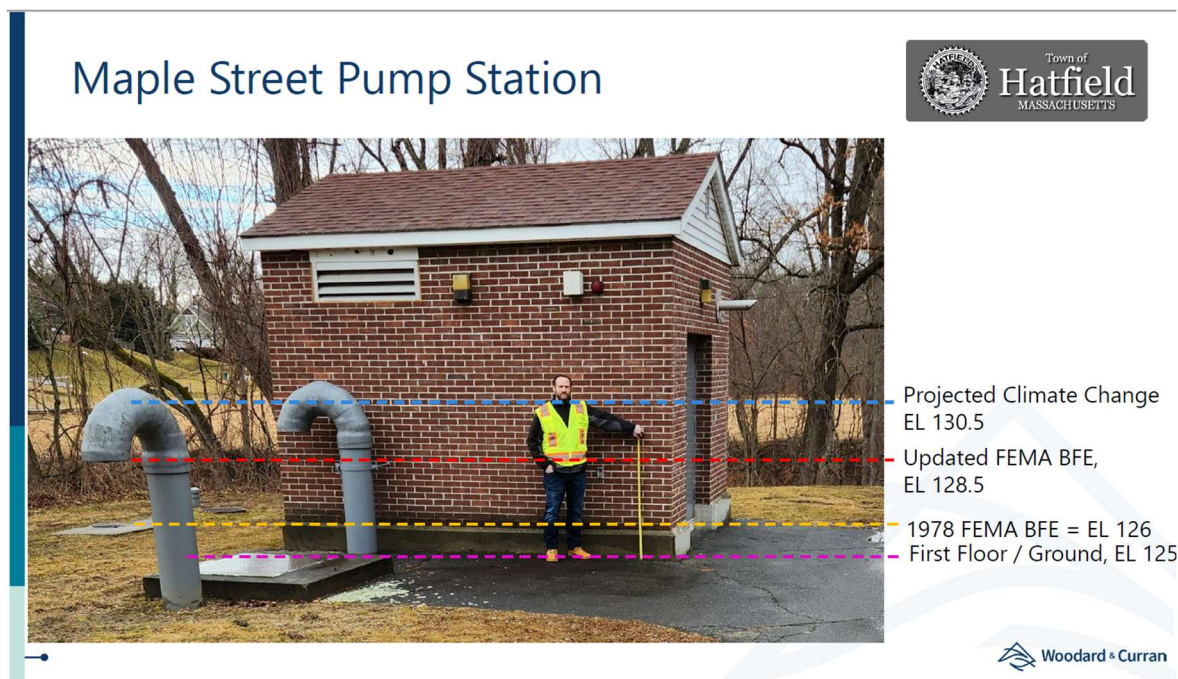
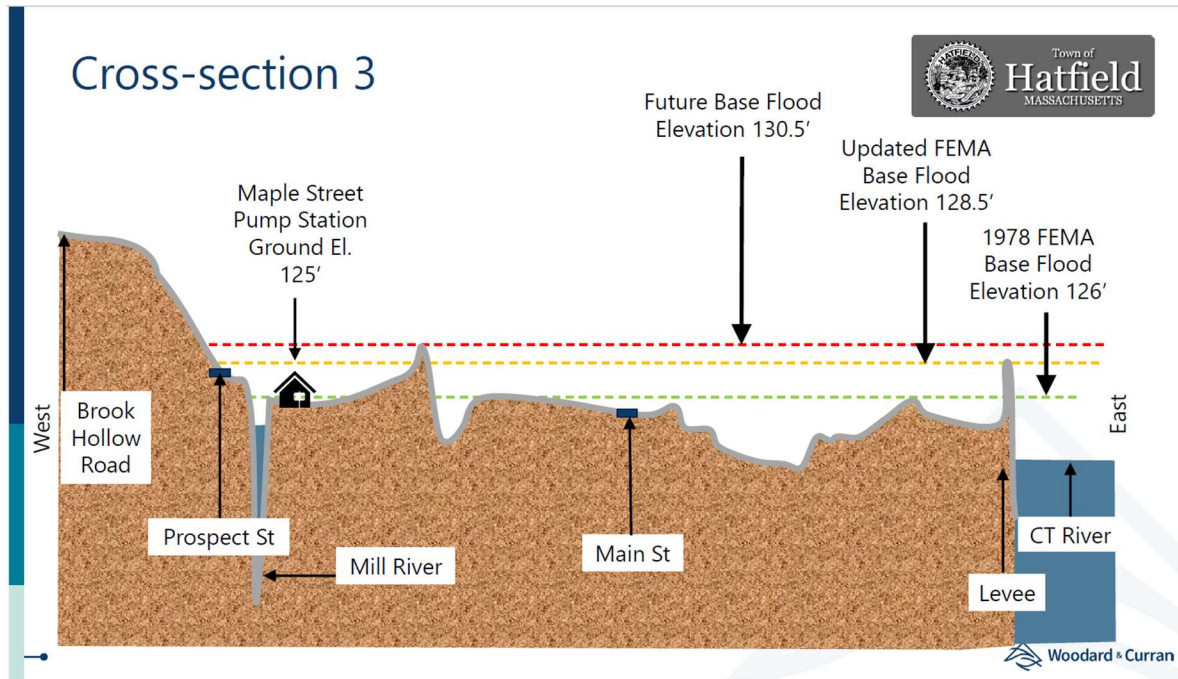
Projected Climate Change, EL 130.5  
Updated FEMA BFE, EL 129  
1978 FEMA BFE = EL 126  
First Floor / Ground, EL 125



Rich described the following from the third cross section:

- Cross Section #3 shows the Mill River to the Maple Street Pump Station to Main Street to the Levee and Connecticut River

It was noted how critically important the pump station is and that the new base flood elevation and future based flood elevation were very concerning.



## Adaptation Strategies

Rich and Joe kicked off the conversation around adaptation by noting the following and showing some slides of possible dry proofing strategies:

- The Connecticut River levee is providing some level of protection, but there is also a backwater effect that will result in flooding during a significant event. River side is higher than landward side. Even though getting some backflow from Mill River. Does reduce flooding. The levee is an asset that is worth maintaining.
- Unless you build a levee all along the CT River, cannot provide protection from the Mill River.
- There is a high price tag without even doing calculations due to the extent of the area that would require protection along the river or a large pump station for the Mill River.
- May be best to focus on flood proofing strategies that can help to minimize loss and maximize recovery. Maybe think about elevating buildings along the lines of the Dr. Hauschka building on Main Street. FEMA has funding where there are repetitive losses.
- Dry proof strategies can include redirecting water from entering a facility and elevating important equipment.
- The process to upgrade the Wastewater Treatment Plan is a significant cost to the Town and now with the understanding of updated and projected flood elevations, the cost could be higher.
- It is important to understand what improvements need to be pursued and then figure out how to program these improvements.

## Dry Proof Strategies



► Protect with.....

### 1. Barriers



Flood Wall



Berm

Redirect water from entering the Facility

### 2. Wetproofing



Elevate Important Equipment

Allow water to flow through the Facility

### 3. Dryproofing



Flood Shield

Block water from entering buildings

### 4. Elevation Changes



Filling

Raising the elevation of the Facility higher than flood depths

### 5. Relocation

Relocate the DPW Facility outside of the floodplain



Discussion generated by members then followed:

- Are there state and federal grants that we ought to be chasing now? Rich noted that coming up with a financial strategy is important to consider.

- When FEMA maps go into effect, it is likely that insurance rates will go up.
- There is an example from Kennebunkport, Maine where they used earthen berms to protect the waste water treatment plant. This is a significant capital investment and even with that investment, the facility is still surrounded by water when it floods.
- The idea is not to raise everything at an existing facility, but to elevate critical elements like generators and building equipment.
- If the Connecticut River reaches a high flood stage, the wastewater treatment plant hydraulically may not be able to drain and could back up. Rich pointed to the example of Westfield which has installed flood doors on its wastewater treatment plant. This is a good local example, he noted.
- How would we gauge the duration of how long water will be that high? Rich noted that his team has not looked at the duration of these floods, but could look at hydrographs. Joe noted that it is likely the flood would last days. Andrew said you would still have damage. What we are learning from the Cape, is that it's the day-to-day nuisance that gets people talking about retreat. From my perspective, pathways forward for creative solutions like flood proofing structures seems worthwhile. Rich agreed and that was his team's gut feeling as consultants.
- So we know certain things are going to flood and now we need to understand them better.
- Could program work of flood proofing evacuation routes into capital projects, such as elevating low points on roads where a culvert crossing is nearing its life expectancy and will be replaced.
- Some of these facilities were placed in unfavorable locations because of a NIMBY attitude of not wanting them nearby so they end up in these flood prone areas. The Maple Street pump station, for example, would have been better to put on Elm Street, but there was a struggle in locating that facility.
- What about sewer systems all along this area?
- All the agricultural fields on the landward side of the berm. Do they work to absorb flood water? Does that create buffer? Are the flood elevation levels you have accounting for that? Rich responded by saying that storage and absorption by soil is such a small part of the equation. Once the Connecticut River rises, it is going to flood no matter what.
- Are the FEMA estimates official now? When can we expect those maps to become official and start impacting insurance? Rich noted that FEMA has already begun to show Towns the maps. About 6 years from now is my guess, he said. Joe chimed in, anywhere from 3 to 40 years. This information is considered best available data. The remapping process gets tied up though with complaints, politicians get involved. This is still a thing though and actual effectiveness for flood insurance may take some time.

#### Next Steps & Meeting Wrap Up

Shawn noted that late hour and called for a close to the meeting so that it could end on time at 8 p.m. He said the next meeting is planned for April 26<sup>th</sup> and then asked for a vote to end the meeting.

VOTE: Motion by Stephanie to end the meeting, seconded by Chris, with unanimous approval.