

Notes from the May 13, 2010
Elkhart River Restoration Association Flood Focus Committee Meeting
Ligonier Police Station, Ligonier, Indiana

In attendance: Gene Lightner, Mike Shellman, Bill and Lynn Reynolds, Joy Y. LeCount, Patty Fisel, Rick Smigielski, David Wick, and Nancy Brown.

Gene began the meeting by handing out copies of the agenda (as had been mailed) and information on the June 16 Public Meeting to present the Silver Jackets report, as well as materials that were used by the Upper Tippecanoe Watershed at their "Forum on Flooding, High Water, and Water Quality" meeting. The Silver Jackets had suggested that the Upper Tippecanoe materials were well prepared, and would serve us well as model documents.

After reviewing the materials, David Wick introduced Rick Smigielski who is the Vice President of the West Lakes Associate, and who also will be joining our committee.

The first item on the agenda was to review details and needs of the June public meeting. Gene said the Silver Jackets would start at either 6:00 or 6:30 PM. It was suggested that the meeting not start before 6:30 so that more people would be able to attend.

The meeting will be at the Rome City School. The Silver Jackets will arrive early to set their tables up. Gene will do the welcome on behalf of the committee and introduce Ken Smith, who is the lead on the Silver Jackets team. They will present their report and then the audience will be encourage to mingle with the presenters and local representatives to ask questions. Several local agencies who deal with flooding issues will be invited to have tables so that all agencies will have knowledgeable representation on hand to field questions.

A form will be provided for each agency to record their "frequently asked questions" and the answers to those questions so that we can then make a FAQ sheet with all the questions and answers. This information will be made available on line.

We discussed who should be invited to have a table and field questions. Local floodplain managers, surveyors, building commissioners, and flood insurance representatives, and probably others, were mentioned. Gene will work on putting together documents similar to those used by the Upper Tippecanoe group and run them past the committee via email so that we can get started with contacts. The documents will include an invitation letter to the public and a promotional flier listing presenters separately from local agencies who are only there to answer questions. Nancy offered to serve as Gene's secretary for this task.

The committee will meet with the Silver Jackets on May 26 at the Ligonier Police Department. They expect to have the report on line by that time. They will do a major news release to officially launch the report and promote the June 16 meeting. When they do that, we will begin our campaign to encourage a large turnout.

It was agreed that Noble and LaGrange Counties should have local representation at the tables, to help keep the focus narrowed to the North Branch Watershed. It was also recognized that interest in the report will reach throughout the watershed, and that the public invitation should be very broad.

Dave Wick agreed to send an invitation to everyone in the West Lakes Association. There is a Lake Association meeting on June 5. It was suggested that Dave Abbott contact Rome City and Kendallville to encourage their participation.

Next we looked at the model floor plan and it was agreed that local representation for regulations on building on the flood plain should be present, Dick Adair and his LaGrange County counterpart; as well as the Surveyor's from both Counties. Rich Smigielski offered to work with the Lake Associations to encourage their participation at a table, and to also provide snacks for the meeting. Nancy said she would provide the drinks. The proposed outline suggested that the Flood Focus Committee have a table. Many members of the committee want (and need) to mingle with the crowd, so Nancy offered to prepare a table exhibit for the Elkhart River Restoration Association rather than the committee. It was agreed to do this.

The second item on the agenda was to discuss what happens beyond this meeting. Gene pointed out that it had been suggested to him that a group like the Maumee River Basin Commission would be best equipped to assist us in pursuing resolutions to the issues in the West Lakes area. No one thinks a group of volunteers can adequately address these issues and work with FEMA and others to find grants. It will be necessary to find an organization with paid staff to assist, which the Elkhart River Restoration Association does not currently have.

Which led to the third item on the agenda: Gene has talked to the Friends of the St. Joe, the St. Joseph River Basin Commission, and Maumee River Basin Commission. Although the committee does not want to commit to any alliance until after the Silver Jackets report is received, they did agree that Gene should continue talks with Karen Mackowiak, Water Quality Manager with the St. Joseph River Basin Commission, to see if there is any way the SJRBC can assist with efforts after the Silver Jackets report is received.

Our next meeting will be that of May 26 with the Silver Jackets, at the Ligonier Police Station. The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 PM.