



Highlands Borough Mayor & Council Meeting Minutes
Henry Hudson Regional High School, 1 Grand Tour, Highlands, NJ
May 14, 2024 – Special Meeting Minutes

SPECIAL MEETING: Meeting came to order at 6:00 PM

The following public meetings statement was read.

The notice requirements provided for in the Open Public Meetings Act have been satisfied. Notice of this meeting was properly given by transmission to the Asbury Park Press and the Two River Times and by posting at the Borough of Highlands Municipal Building and filing with the Borough Clerk all on April 30, 2024. Items listed on the agenda are subject to change.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL

Councilmember Chelak, Councilmember Melnyk, Council President Olszewski, and Mayor Broullon were present. Councilmember Cervantes was absent.

Also in attendance were representatives from US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP):

Bethany McClanahan, USACE	Kelley Staffieri, NJDEP
Arianna Stimpfl, USACE	Dennis Reinknecht, NJDEP
Jason Shea, USACE	Vincent Lussier, NJDEP
Erin O'Donnell, USACE (?)	Rachael Siecinski, NJDEP
	Robert VonBriel, NJDEP

Borough Attorney Brian Chabarek, Esq., Borough Engineer Joseph Raftery, Borough Administrator Michael Muscillo and Municipal Clerk Nancy Tran.

FLOOD WALL PROJECT PRESENTATION

Mayor Broullon had everyone – USACE, NJDEP, Council, and Mr. Chabarek – introduce themselves.

Ms. McClanahan gave an overview of the agenda and presentation. Mr. VonBriel explained NJDEP's involvement and role with the project. Ms. McClanahan summarized the legislative aspect of the project, alternative considerations, and draft renderings for Veterans Park and Snug Harbor beach options with examples of bulkheads, waterfront access, floodwalls, road closure gates, and interior drainage structures. She explained the project's current stage and next steps in design and construction.

PUBLIC PORTION:

Trish Uber, Beach Blvd., asked why the Borough was still discussing this matter. Mayor Broullon advised that the Borough was working on a question to be considered at the ballot in the fall for residents to vote on. She explained what would happen if the question was voted down.

Mayor Broullon then proceeded to answer questions that were submitted with input from USACE and NJDEP representatives. She noted the amount of money that Highlands would be responsible for regarding the project. Ms. McClanahan answered how impacted property owners would be noticed. The cost for maintenance of the project is still to be determined. Mr. Lussier explained the purpose of USACE, NJDEP, and Highlands holding this Special Meeting.

Bob Davis, South Bay Ave., asked about the erosion rate and Mr. Lussier answered that erosion would happen with or without the project wall. Mr. Davis asked for clarification of the Veterans Park design and Mr. VonBriel and Ms. McClanahan gave further details.

Tom Stramka, Gravelly Point, voiced his issues with the wall project and stated that nature will find a way regardless.

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Geoffrey Pierini, Captain's Cove, asked if this was an "all or nothing" deal with the wall project. Ms. McClanahan explained what the approved funding was for and that if there was any substantial deviation from the proposal that the funding would be lost, and that they would have to start all over again.

Mike Marchetti, Beach Blvd., asked how the project would help in a significant storm event and Mr. Lussier gave the Keansburg example. Mr. Marchetti asked if there would be water views from street level and Ms. McClanahan answered that it depends on the elevation of the street.

Barbara Domings, Bay Ave., asked if there was consideration for stormwater coming from the hills and the ground. Ms. McClanahan referred to the project website and suggested that Ms. Domings email her additional questions that she may have. Ms. Staffieri advised that stormwater management is considered with the Borough's recent BRIC grant. She noted that the wall project will be designed and constructed in phases and that the specifics of what will happen in each phase will be answered at later dates.

Valerie Montecalvo, Portland Rd., asked if there was a cost comparison of damages sustained from Superstorm Sandy and the cost of the project. Mr. Lussier answered that a 50-year analysis was done and that the cost of potential damage is more than the cost of the project. Mayor Broullon added that the composition of properties then vs. now are vastly different and gave an example of properties on Gravelly Point Rd.

Mike last name unknown, Gravelly Point, asked about the wall's impact on the environment and wildlife. Mr. Reinknecht noted the USACE feasibility study and their experience with cleanly constructing projects along the east coast, noting NJDEP's role and Highlands' role in the project. Ms. McClanahan referenced the NEPA analysis.

Janine Skiff, Ocean Ave., voiced her belief that the BRIC project would better address the stormwater problem than the wall and asked why they don't build the wall on Sandy Hook instead.

Female name unknown, shared why she bought a home and moved to Highlands and her experience with flooding in town and asked for further clarification of the project. Mr. Lussier answered that only the Veterans Park area was currently funded; that the project is for the consideration of infrastructure and properties that aren't elevated, and that the rest of the project is not designed yet.

John Valkos, Bay Ave., asked for clarification of the flood wall position, its relation to bulk heads and impact on flood insurance. Mr. Lussier answered that it depends on the area and that the flood insurance was a question for FEMA.

Bob Zilinski, Portland Rd., voiced his support for consideration of the project and noted the rising sea level.

Pat Catalano, Private Rd., voiced her concerns regarding safety issues.

Mike Cannon, Central Ave., suggested that representatives work and conduct meetings with each neighborhood.

Kevin R., asked about possible damage caused by breached vessels.

Mary Elizabeth Conroy, Gravelly Point, asked for further clarification about the ballot question for voting in November. Mayor Broullon answered by giving the example of the regionalization ballot question process and added that the Council is hoping to have drafted the question by July.

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Mr. Valkos, Bay Ave., asked how the flood walls would work and who was responsible for its operations.

John last name unknown, Beach Blvd., expressed that he needed more clarity on how working in phases would work and asked for clarification about the Snug Harbor Beach rendering. Ms. McClanahan reminded all that the picture was just a draft rendering and that there was no definitive design yet.

Dave Baker, Marina Pl., expressed that the plans were too ambiguous. Ms. Staffieri stated that she understood residents' concerns about the uncertainty of phasing the project.

Bronwyn Link, Central Ave., asked about the construction of the wall, what would happen if the project were voted down, and about the bike path. Mr. Lussier answered that there would be no drilling, only pile driving. Ms. McClanahan advised that this was a collaborative process and that the project will not likely happen if it gets voted down. Ms. Staffieri added that the State wants participation from Highlands. The bike path will not be impacted as the project stops at One Willow. Ms. Link then read a statement voicing her opposition to the project.

John Gallagher, Sea Drift, asked if there was a Plan B if the project gets voted down. Mayor Broullon answered that the recently awarded BRIC grant addresses storm water runoff from Monmouth Hills, as well as pump stations and maintenance. Mr. Raftery expanded on the BRIC project and advised that Highlands will be collaborating with USACE and NJDEP regarding Highlands' infrastructure and improvements.

Council President Olszewski shared her recent experience with an increase in her insurance costs.

Joan F., Gravelly Point, asked about voting rights of Highlands property owners whose primary residence is elsewhere.

Kerry Sullivan, Gravelly Point, asked about what construction materials will be used and where they will be stationed.

Rosemary Flannery, Central Ave., voiced her concerns about the aesthetics of the wall, wanting to know what the wall will look like, as well as the cost of other options.

Mr. Shea noted that it was up to Highlands to decide if it wants to adapt and rebuild after storm events or adapt to the project wall. He added that it was deemed not cost effective to build on Sandy Hook.

Mayor Broullon closed Public Portion. Ms. McClanahan and Ms. Staffieri thanked all for coming out and Highlands for having them.

ADJOURNMENT:

Offered by Mayor Broullon and Seconded by Council President Olszewski. All in Favor. None opposed. Meeting adjourned at 7:55pm.

Approve: 
Mayor Carolyn Broullon

Attest: 
Nancy Tran, Municipal Clerk