Wagener Terrace Neighborhood Association

October 18, 2021

Minutes

[Virtual Meeting via Google Meet]

WTNA website address: www.wagenerterrace.org

The October meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by President Petar Lemajic. He asked for any new meeting attendees to feel free to introduce themselves. No new members identified themselves.

FINANCIALS: Treasurer Gail Thomas gave an accounting of the finances. We have $8,194.54 in Checking, which is lower than last month because we donated $250 to Florence Crittenton and $250 to the Lowcountry Food Bank. We have $22,506.60 in Savings, with $17,500 of that set aside for the 2022 Oyster Roast.

CITY COUNCIL/POLICE/CITADEL: Lt. Dasher was not present. There was also no Citadel representation. Councilman Dudley Gregorie was present. He emphasized that he thinks what Dale Morris has to say is very important, and then he turned his time over to Mr. Morris.

LOCAL ISSUES: Dale Morris, the City of Charleston's Chief Resilience Officer, was present. He joined the City about 5 weeks ago as a replacement for Mark Wilbert, who retired. Mr. Morris said that he is happy to meet with us to give us a more formal presentation, but for now he wanted to give a quick overview of the Draft Optimized Plan that the Army Corps released regarding how to protect Charleston from storm surge. Charleston was one of several cities that got a fully-funded risk management project as part of a federal authorization and appropriation bill, so there was no cost to the City for this study. A Draft was released in 2020, and the Army Corps listened to feedback and then moved from environment assessment to an environmental impact study. They took a more detailed look and expanded the study by 8 months.

The Army Corps of Engineers released the Draft Optimized Plan on September 10, 2021. Among the key findings are that the alignment has mostly stayed the same, but the overall cost of the structure went down from $1.7b to $1.1b. They achieved that decrease in cost by reducing marsh impacts from 110 acres to 85 acres. Reducing marsh impacts means no building in the marsh, which is three times as expensive as building on land, and no additional payment for mitigation. The recent Draft has also removed the structure by the high and low Battery because they realized that it would not help, as the same level of protection can be had with or without the structure there. The Army Corps added living shorelines into the project, which was highly requested during the initial comment period. They added oyster reefs and

similar kinds of marsh reinforcements for the areas of the peninsula where the structure is going to be in the marsh. They also added $54m in the budget as a starting point for aesthetic mitigation, as this project will have some impact upon view sheds.

The comment period for the Draft Optimized Plan is for one more week, until October 25. Mr. Morris encouraged everyone to submit comments by phone, email, or through the Army Corps Charleston District website. He said they did listen to the first round of comments, and they are still listening and are required to listen. Comments will be reviewed in a quick period of a few weeks, likely by November 15. The Army Corps will make any adjustments necessary from the comments, and they will turn the Optimized Plan into the NED (National Economic Development) Plan. It will go through a formal process called the Agency Decision Milestone, which will then become the draft final plan, about which the City will then have to make a decision. The final plan would move up the chain of command through 3 levels of review - 1. the district here would do another Quality Assurance and Quality Control (QAQC) Review, 2. sometime in early 2022 they would move it up to the division in Atlanta, and then 3. it would go to Washington for headquarters review. If it passes all of that review, it will go through a process called a Signed Chiefs Report. The Chief of Army Corps of Engineers will sign and send it to the Office of Management and Budget, which is the White House, and to the authorizing committees in Congress for funding. Funding will be needed for 2 things - to move into PED (Pre-Construction Engineering and Design) and to move into construction. Congress has full authority to decide to fund it just PED or fund both PED and construction.

Mr. Morris stated that in the last 3 years the Army Corps of Engineers has spent $3.7m studying whether a surge risk reduction structure is feasible on the Charleston peninsula, but no design or engineering has been done. They looked at the peninsula and assessed what the surge risks are, what they can do to mitigate those surge risks, and what the alternatives are. They studied the top alternatives with high level impact analysis - what would the impact be on surge risk mitigation, on view sheds, on aesthetics, on mobility, etc. They looked at whether it can be built and whether it is constructible. They selected the best alternative and ran an economic analysis on it, and then looked at possible costs. All of that taken together is - is this feasible? Mr. Morris said that the line that we have seen drawn around the peninsula to show where the structure would go is just a Feasibility Analysis. It is not a strong proposal - it is just an idea of where this can be, is it feasible, and will it meet the federal interest in this project.

Mr. Morris explained that the federal interest is generally determined by a benefit cost analysis (BCA) which produces a BCR (benefit cost ratio). This project originally, in March 2020, had a BCR of 2.2, which is pretty good, and means that for every $1 spent, you get $2.2 in benefit, which is a net positive. The benefits are generally avoidant losses, so over the period of this structure's life, for every $1 spent, you save the government $2.2. The BCR on the current draft of the project is 10.2, which is the highest BCR of any Army Corps of Engineers project right now. In the recent South Atlantic Coastal Study (SACS), Florida was determined to have the most risk in the region since it has the most shoreline, but South Carolina has the second-most amount of risk, which will increase with sea level rise. Mr. Morris said there is so much benefit to mitigating our risk, and if the City decides it wants to step into PED and construction, then

Congress will fund it. With this kind of high BCR, it will be difficult for Congress to say no. He said that if you have a hurricane or tropical storm surge event, and you do not have a plan, you will get the quickest plan possible, which is what happened after Katrina and in some places after Sandy. Mr. Morris said we have an opportunity to thoughtfully design something, to carefully understand what it is going to be, where it is going to be, what it is going to look like. That is what the PED phase is - what it will look like. Feasibility is an economic phase - considering whether we can build it and will it be feasible enough for the government.

VP Jarett Nicholson asked about the timeline for breaking ground on this project. Mr. Morris said that the Army Corps has a PED phase schedule of 3 years. Mr. Morris is not sure they can meet that because of our challenging and complicated environment. He thinks PED will take 4 years. PED is done in 4 phases - 1. From the southern side of the Citadel, over to the Joe Riley stadium and down to the Coast Guard station just south of Broad Street, 2. Low Battery and High Battery, 3. From the Carolina Yacht Club up to north of the Ravenel Bridge where the structure ends, and 4. Wagener Terrace. PED for Wagener Terrace probably would not begin for 2 or 3 years. Federal policy is that the federal government will pay 65% of the cost of the project, and the local government will pay 35%. That means $385m for the City, spent over a 10-12 year period. It can be done faster if necessary, but it is also very dependent upon the labor supply. Of the $385m from the City, between $125-135m is estimated to come from the easements that are needed on public property (city or state or possibly port) needed to construct this structure. He said those are not expenses you pay, but they get credited to the local sponsor for the offset, so the $385m turns out to be about $250m. PED cost is $50m, and City cost is about $17m, and that is the money to see whether or not we really want to do this.

Jennifer Metts has riverside property, and she said that she really wants to make sure that neighbors who are directly affected understand the full implication of this structure. Mr. Morris said that construction in the marsh requires a construction easement and a permanent maintenance and inspection easement. They will drive piles to support walls, it gets constructed, and it tilts back a little so that the part of the structure that faces the river is a little past 90 degrees, and behind the wall is a structure to help hold it in place. He said that you can quantify negative impacts of going into marsh, and those impacts have to be mitigated. In the marsh off WT and in the marsh by Newmarket Creek, there will be a structure there to limit surge. Mr. Morris said that if you look at the topography of Wagener Terrace (WT), our neighborhood can be severed from this project because of elevation. There is 12-foot elevation in a lot of places. If we did not build anything, we would maintain the same level of risk and would need to understand what that means. He said we would not have any additional protection and are still carrying risk. Citizens that do not have flood insurance would be on their own if something happens. Hurricane Hugo was huge, but it missed us, and it is estimated that if Hugo hit Charleston, it would have been $20b in damages. He said expenses add up, so we need to consider what is better to do. From a federal perspective, this is the best return on investment for reducing surge risk.

Councilman Gregorie asked whether it is an either/or situation - is it that we do the wall or we do not, or is it possible to use natural barriers? Mr. Morris responded by saying that people mean

different things when they reference nature-based features. To build a levee on land, you would have to take houses because to build a levee you need 4 feet of width for every 1 foot of height. The surge structure outside of WT is designed to be 4 feet, so for a levee you would need 16 feet on each side and 10 feet at the top. You cannot have trees on it, and it has to be mowed. In some places in WT, you mostly have gravity drainage, so the Army Corps has to deal with the water they impound by pumping it out, so you would have to then build pump stations, which would require a 60 foot x 60 foot parcel of ground, which would also require taking homes. The other option is to build it in the marsh, but the elevation goes down into marsh, so you would have to build up, and it would instead need to be 32 feet x 32 feet x10 feet, and there would still be obstruction. Mr. Morris said that other natural barriers include salt marsh grass and mangroves, which can slow surge and lower wave height, but that it is generally estimated that you need 1 mile of salt marsh or half a mile of mangroves to knock one foot off the top of the surge. Therefore, to really deal with surge here, we would need 2.5-5 miles of mangroves and salt marsh. He said you can restore your marshes for this reason, but there's just not enough space for us to add enough for it to make a substantial difference. The relative height of the wall depends on where it is built. Mr. Morris thinks in WT most of the land is 7-9 feet, and if that is the case, then the structure needs to be 3-5 feet (to get to 12 feet).

Councilman Gregorie asked what effect the various construction phases will have on the communities upstream and what will happen to areas that have not had any construction.
Mr. Morris said that the Army Corps did a water level height analysis and found that if an 8-foot surge of water comes in and hits the wall, the water level would go up in other areas (like Mt. Pleasant and James Island) by no more than 1-2 inches. The further up the river you are, the less of a concern of inward surge impact. The main concern for areas like Rosemont is that once water is pushed in, it may flow back out with force, and there can be unexpected backflooding. If the structure is there, then there will not be a backflooding risk.

President Lemajic said that we will do what we can to engage the neighborhood on this topic.

MINUTES: The September meeting minutes are posted on the website. Liz Bronneberg moved to accept the minutes as posted, and Tim Jarosch seconded. The motion passed, and the minutes were approved

COMMITTEES

1. Environment - Tim Jarosch introduced himself as a former engineer who worked in chemical engineering and then environmental engineering, including at the Savannah River site and the EPA. In 2003, he worked for a company located where the Magnolia development is. He said he knows a lot from an engineering perspective, but he needs local contacts, and he wants to know what people want to know about the Magnolia development and what we are interested in learning. President Lemajic said that we have an environment committee that he would be a good fit for, and maybe next month we can talk about what that means and what role he could play.

2. Oyster Roast - VP Nicholson gave an update. January 9 is the oyster roast date. He said we are still on track. Kelly Hobbs with Lowndes Grove confirmed that it is still a go and there does not appear to be many COVID-19 limitations. There will be some differences with ticketing, but we will likely still be able to allow similar numbers of attendees, around 500-600. Jamie Westendorff, our longtime food vendor, has given doubt about whether he can do it. He is not a hard no, but we need alternatives. He has given us a great deal, so if he cannot do it, then tickets may have to be more expensive. VP Nicholson said they have reached out to Rodney Scott and their caterers and other nearby food vendors. The Oyster Roast Committee still wants to be able to do both the oyster roast and the buffet if we can, but the oyster roast part will take priority. The next Oyster Roast Committee meeting is next Monday, October 25. He said there are still a lot of big level question marks, but hopefully everything will be solidified in the next weeks to come. Please reach out to VP Nicholson to volunteer.

3. Yard of the Month - This month's YOM winner is 150 Darlington Avenue. Congratulations to Mike Hilfer and Kerry Murphy! Mr. Hilfer says he recently set up the fogger for a smoky ambience, and other meeting attendees were enthusiastic about how awesome it looks.

4. Sunshine - Treasurer Thomas offered condolences to Councilman Gregorie on the death of his mother. She also mentioned a birth down the street from her, and she said she is going to find out who it is and take them a card.

New Concerns

1. Treasurer Thomas wants to start a new initiative to help neighbors get street numbers on their houses. She said it is so hard to find houses because so many do not have street numbers listed. President Lemajic encouraged everyone to think about this, and we will bring it up for discussion in a future meeting.

2. James Bishop lives at 236 St. Margaret Street, and he is looking to add a front porch to his house. He realized through a site survey that his current stoop is already past the setback. There is a 25 ft. setback, but the stoop is already at roughly 24 feet. He would need a variance, and he wanted to put a feeler out about how the neighborhood would feel about it. President Lemajic suggested that he bring some drawings to the next meeting and get the support of neighbors, and we could discuss it and vote on a letter of support.

3. Tyler Hueter would like an additional meeting with Mr. Morris, so President Lemajic said he will look for time to schedule an additional informational meeting.

Treasurer Thomas moved to close the meeting, and VP Nicholson seconded. Unanimous vote to close the meeting. Meeting closed at 8:05pm.

The next WTNA Meeting will be November 15, 2021 at 7:00 pm.

Handy Contacts:

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www.wagenerterrace.org

Tree Program: Anna McAllister

843-814-5553 or
annamcallister@aol.com

Police Dispatch (non-emergency) 843-743-7200

www.crimeweb.net

Lowndes Grove MOD 843-708-4314

Code/Livability 843-805-3226

Councilman Gregorie 843-327-7900 (Mona Lisa) 843-819-0507

Councilman Sakran (District 3)

Councilman Gregorie's personal # 843-819-6619

City of Charleston Citizen Services Desk 843-724-7311

BOD: Petar Lemajic, Jarrett Nicholson, Gail Thomas, Jeanie Knowlton, Tyler Hueter, Susan Cale, Nancy Wilson, and Anna Turner

Completed: October 20, 2021