

August 18, 2009

The Chehalis city council held a special joint work session with the city of Centralia on Tuesday, August 18, 2009, in the Centralia city hall. Centralia Mayor Tim Browning called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. Mayor Ketchum and the following Chehalis council members were present: Terry Harris, Robin Fuller, and Dennis Dawes. Councilors Pope, Taylor, and Lund were absent (excused). The following Centralia council members were present: Ryan Barrett, Ted Shannon, Bonnie Canaday, Harlan Thompson, and Lee Coumbs. Councilor Bill Bates was absent (excused). Staff present from Chehalis included: Merlin MacReynold, City Manager; Judy Schave, City Clerk; and Bob Nacht, Community Development Director. Staff present from Centralia included: Patrick Sorensen, City Manager; Carol Hamilton, Administrative Assistant; Bob Berg, Police Chief; Kahle Jennings, Utilities Director; Emil Pierson, Community Development Director; and Marc Baine, IT Manager. Lewis County Commissioners present included: Ron Averill and Bill Schulte. Guests at the work session included: John Donahue and Bart Gernhart from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT); Keith Phillips from the Governor's Executive Policy Office; and Bill Goss from the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps).

Mayor Ketchum stated Congressman Brian Baird sent his apologies for not being in attendance, noting he had a town hall meeting in Longview, Washington, that same evening. Both mayors thanked the representatives from the various agencies for attending the meeting.

1. Work Session on Current Status of Flood Projects in the Chehalis River Basin. Keith Phillips reported, not too long ago, Congressman Baird invited Governor Christine Gregoire on a helicopter tour of the Chehalis River basin to look at flooding issues and flood storage. Mr. Phillips reported the Governor came back early from her vacation to make the tour because she clearly remembered the personal tragedies, property damage, and the business impacts of the floods on the Chehalis River, in particular the 2007 flood. He stated it was still clear in her mind, and she knew the importance of doing a better job at preventing flood damage throughout the basin.

Mr. Phillips reported the Governor requested that the legislature continue full state funding for Chehalis flood work and was pleased when they agreed that despite the current economy and the state budget situation, it was something that deserved full priority.

Mr. Phillips reported the state's interest was still the same with regard to the work, and emphasized three of the objectives, which included:

- Securing the best possible protection for homes and businesses in the basin
- Protecting transportation corridors and access to the hospital
- Designing a program that works at the basin level

Mr. Phillips reported they viewed the twin cities project as a key piece of the basin-wide flood mitigation program. He indicated any program that addressed the entire basin had to have an effective solution for the twin city communities, as well as the freeway. Mr. Phillips noted there were some who felt the up-river water retention facilities would either conflict with, or compete with the levee project at Centralia and Chehalis; however, he believed there was no reason to speculate one way or the other. He added the Corps and the Lewis County Public Utility District (PUD) were gathering the information needed, and at some point and time a decision would be made on how the two could fit together.

Mr. Phillips emphasized that state government could not move forward on a flood project without the support of the citizens that live in the basin. He noted under state law a formal agreement was needed between the basin governments, the state, and the federal government before the state could release any of the money appropriated for flood project construction.

Mr. Phillips stated they were pleased that the basin governments stepped up and came together in the form of the Flood Authority. He noted the state was a strong supporter of the work of the authority, seeing it as a central forum where they could build agreements and where decisions could be made that were not only durable, but would also get implemented.

Mr. Phillips expressed thanks from the Governor for the serious effort, and the leadership and dedication of the Corps. The Governor also appreciated the roll of the basin partners, including the counties, the tribes and the cities. Mr. Phillips also expressed his thanks to the Mayors and Councilors for supporting the flood authority members, for making some of the really tough decisions on floodplain management and land use, and for taking active steps to make sure citizens were informed and fully engaged.

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John Donahue reported the state's role was that of a non-federal sponsor of the project, but he himself also had the role of acting as a liaison to the Corps. He provided a PowerPoint presentation on some of the background, assumptions, and purpose of the twin cities project. Mr. Donahue also provided a broad project schedule to bring everyone up to date on how the plans were coming together and how they expected things to transpire in the future. Some of the items talked about in the PowerPoint included:

- Project Purpose – to reduce flood damage in the vicinity of Chehalis and Centralia; mitigate environmental impacts due to the project, which meet current safety standards in place; and include and examine anything that can be done to assist stakeholders involved in the process
- Access – provide good integration in the project to support other infrastructure and services, including transportation
- Partnerships - Partners in the process include: tribal, local, state and federal stakeholders
- Assumptions – Project should be cost effective; operations and maintenance should be acceptable to the sponsor; project should be feasible and constructible; must be acceptable to the Corps, the non-federal sponsor and the partners; must minimize and mitigate environmental impacts; and mitigation plans would be approved by responsible state and federal agencies

Mr. Donahue outlined the project history over the past 30 years, to include:

- In 1982 a feasibility study identified that the dam at the Skookumchuck should be improved in order to protect the city and outlying areas
- In 1992 further detail about the 1982 study indicated there was not enough benefit to that part of the work, and the proposal was abandoned the same year
- In 1998 Lewis County came back to the Corps and asked that work resume, which resulted in a new project study plan in 1999; that study plan kicked-off the most recent effort, resulting in a document called the General Re-evaluation Report; the re-evaluation report resulted in a congressional authorization in 2007, which would allow the project to proceed
- In 2008 the state legislature appropriated money for WSDOT to sponsor that particular project;
- In 2004 the authorized project costs were \$124 million, to be split between the federal and non-federal sponsors

Mr. Donahue continued his discussion on the 2007 authorized project, which covered an extensive area. He added a number of alternatives were investigated on the path towards the authorized plan, including: Skookumchuck Dam modifications; floodplain modifications, including by-pass and overbank excavation, a levee system, flow restrictors, non-structural alternatives, and water retention structures. Mr. Donahue reported the authorized plan ended up being additional storage at Skookumchuck Dam; levees along the Skookumchuck and Chehalis Rivers that would provide 100-year protection, and a limited number of properties outside the project would be raised. He noted the design time was stipulated to be three years, and the construction was expected to be four to seven years beyond that.

Mr. Donahue reported 80 percent of the project benefits were to residents and businesses in Centralia and Chehalis, and other protected areas; and 20 percent would benefit I-5, to include setback levees to help allow the floodplain and channels to work naturally. Mr. Donahue stated the project plan would minimize induced damages by minimizing or eliminating any downstream or upstream impacts caused by the project. He added the Corps would continue to support local communities with flood fighting efforts even if the project was in place.

Mr. Donahue reviewed the schedule, pointing out they expected the design phase to be complete by November 2011. After that, they would be looking for an agreement in which everybody was on board with the project, as designed and laid out. Mr. Donahue stated the project/partner agreement would need to be in place by April 2012, followed by activities associated with any real estate acquisitions. He indicated a lot of the construction timeline had to do with funding appropriations, adding once construction was underway it could take as little as three to four years, depending on funding.

Bill Goss, project manager with the Corps, discussed the different phases starting with the design and evaluation for phase 1 activities, which included the following:

- Update the hydrology and hydraulics
- Update civil engineering and assumptions

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- Look at economic and environmental issues, and assumptions
- Reformulate mitigation and refine communication plan
- Look at cultural resources
- Public involvement and Communications

Mr. Goss noted three upcoming open house events: the first on September 16, in Rochester, Washington; the second on September 23, in Montesano, Washington; and the third on September 30, at Centralia Middle School from 4:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Goss reported separate from the twin cities project the Corps was also working on a Chehalis basin-project. He provided the following chart of general investigation information.

	Chehalis Basin-wide Project	Twin Cities Project
Sponsors	Grays Harbor	State of Washington
Partners	Chehalis Basin Partnership, Flood Authority	Flood Authority
Geographical Area	Entire Basin	Areas around Centralia and Chehalis
Project Purpose	Flood Damage Reduction and Ecosystem Restoration	Flood Damage and Restoration

Mr. Goss reported on the history of the Chehalis basin-wide project, to include the following:

- The project started in 1999, at which time Grays Harbor County requested the Corp initiate an ecosystem restoration study with incidental flood damage reduction alternatives, which was completed in 2000
- A cost-share agreement was signed with Grays Harbor County in 2001
- The feasibility study began in September 2001; however, the project has not been in the federal budget for the last few fiscal years
- \$574,000 was received in 2009 to pursue the flood damage reduction and ecosystem restoration project
- The flood authority decided to partner in the Basin-wide Flood Damage Reduction General Investigation in March 2008
- Grays Harbor County was requested to be the flood damage reduction sponsor in March 2009.

Mr. Goss reported the work being done in the fall of 2009 would include:

- Reformulating the project to include flood damage reduction and ecosystem restoration
- Update the project management plan and the federal cost share agreement
- Reinitiate public involvement
- Initiate basin-wide surface and ground water study with the USGS with sponsor support

Mr. Goss stated the general project schedule, if fully funded, would include:

- Feasibility study complete in six years (2009-2015)
- Pre-construction complete in five years (2015-2020)
- Construction complete in seven years (2020-2027)

Councilor Coumbs inquired about the coordination between the two projects, asking if they were all wrapped into one. Mr. Goss stated they were two completely separate general investigations, adding the Twin Cities Project was in the design phase and the Chehalis basin-wide project was just going into the feasibility study phase.

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Councilor Coumbs felt the Corps' focus seemed to change regularly with every new event, with reference to what projects would be done. Mr. Goss stated the Corps was trying to look at all of the influences basin-wide and not just concentrate on one main tributary.

Councilor Harris asked if the water retention upstream would affect the amount of water the Corps was designing to distribute with levees. Mr. Goss stated that issue wasn't authorized under the twin cities project; however they would look at that in the Chehalis basin-wide project. Councilor Harris inquired as to why they wouldn't do something upstream first or simultaneously, instead of starting in the middle and working their way out. Mr. Goss noted the twin cities project looked at some other features rather than just levees; however, the levees were most feasible based on the cost benefit ratio.

Mayor Ketchum asked, with regard to the general investigation study, if the Corps was going to incorporate water retention in coordination with the levee plan. He noted the Corps was sent a letter from Congressman Baird asking them to try and incorporate that into the whole study. Mr. Goss reported the basin-wide project feasibility study would include water retention, and any past studies or current studies being done by the PUD.

Councilor Thompson asked whether the Corps would ever just start from a baseline and move forward on what to study, rather than starting a new study every time another flood occurred. Mr. Goss reported their economic team spent two weeks in the area looking at some of the data and damage from the last two flood events. He noted they incorporated the new information into their database, and using their hydraulic model, they can set the levee at various heights to find out what the level of protection would be. Mr. Phillips reported they were updating the hydraulic model, ground-truthing it to the current 2009 flood levels, based on what was documented by local governments. He hoped there would be no major flood events in the next few years; however, if there were, it might show the modeling was completely wrong and they might have to stop and incorporate the new information into the model.

Councilor Dawes talked briefly about the Skookumchuck River, noting it appeared that the work that was done to raise the dam level on the Skookumchuck really had a significant impact on avoiding a number of potential problems during the last flood event. He asked if that could be compared to the potential of water retention. Mr. Goss noted it was proposed, but to his knowledge it had not been done. Mr. Phillips noted they had drawn down the level of the reservoir before the last storm, and were able to avoid the flooding that happened in the 1990s. Councilor Dawes reported he was looking for something more than what he was hearing, with reference to a basin type approach. Mr. Goss stated under the twin cities project they were looking at the Skookumchuck using a hydraulic model, and would be addressing additional storage on the Skookumchuck. He noted basin-wide, they would be looking at other proposed water retention facilities.

Councilor Fuller read a memo from Councilor Taylor, who was unable to attend the meeting. He noted he had a lot of the same beliefs and concerns on retention that Councilor Taylor noted in the memo. The memo from Councilor Taylor stated the following: "I am the City of Chehalis representative on the Chehalis River Flood Authority, and the devastating floods of 2007 showed graphically the need for a basin-wide flood solution. I support water retention because it's the only flood control measure that provides direct benefits to every community from Pe Ell to Aberdeen. Both the Corps 1982 study, and the work done last year by Northwest Hydrology, showed that if 100,000 acre feet of water could be stored in the upper Chehalis during a flood event, the level of flooding would be reduced by nearly four feet at Mellen Street. We learned already that the 'Levee Only Plan' won't work and will never be built. Lewis County, Chehalis, and Centralia all made clear in 2003 that they did not have the resources to be the local sponsors of the Corps Twin Cities Plan. I feel sure that Lewis County and Chehalis will not agree to become local sponsors of a 'Levee Only Plan' in the future, just as I am sure Centralia alone does not have the resources to pay for land acquisition and maintenance costs of a 'Levee Only Plan.' The best answer for everybody, including Centralia and Chehalis, is to combine water retention and smaller levees. I support Congressman Baird's proposal expressed in the letter to the Corps and in the follow-up letter from the Lewis County Commissioners, and strongly urge the Corps to incorporate water retention into its general investigation study of the Chehalis basin. This is a fine point, but it's important for the Corps and the City Council of both communities to understand: I believe water retention is feasible and is a common sense part of flood control here. Some others speculate that water retention is not feasible. The only way we will know is if the Flood Authority continues with the feasibility study of water retention, and if the Corps will take a fair look, taking into account recent flood events. If it turns out that water retention is not feasible, then I would be willing to look again at the 'Levee Only Plan.' But I would reconsider my position against a 'Levee Only Plan' only after the Corps joins in a fair and thorough evaluation of water retention."

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Councilor Fuller asked what the base of the levee would be if what Councilor Taylor expressed was true, with reference to dropping the level four feet at Mellen Street. Mr. Goss noted he couldn't answer that question at that time; however he could get the information and email it to him. Councilor Fuller asked if the Corp would save money on the levee end with the use of retention areas. Mr. Goss stated they would have to weigh the costs of the savings in the levee against the cost of the dam, and the benefits that would be derived from each.

Councilor Thompson asked if they would be looking at water retention on the Newaukum River, as well other areas that received significant water. Mr. Donahue felt as the Corps moved forward with the management plan for that particular study, it was important to consider the entire basin and indicated there would be a wide range of options they would solicit ideas and suggestions for.

Councilor Harris asked if Mr. Goss would explain the 35/65/95 percent design process. Mr. Goss reported during the first 35 percent of the design process they would try to capture the main details and send that information out for review and comments before moving forward in the process. He noted at 65 percent they incorporate any major features they may have left out, or ideas that local entities want to incorporate, and again, send it out for review and comments before moving on. Mr. Goss stated they would further refine the design to 95 percent and then finalize it. Mr. Donahue indicated the first milestone opportunity of 35 percent was currently scheduled at the beginning of 2010.

Councilor Canaday noted the citizens were not happy and all they really wanted to know was when the first turn of the shovel would be. She wondered if the Corps was going to continue to add information from every flood from now until 2027, and not get anything done between now and then. Mr. Goss hoped they would be able to stay on schedule and start construction in 2014, regardless of any new flood events.

Councilor Harris noted the general public doesn't always understand the language that entities use, such as the term '100-year flood,' which actually meant every year there was a one percent chance that a flood event could occur.

Councilor Barrett felt no one, including the citizens could get a straight answer on what the total costs were going to be, and asked what the possibility was of the two projects joining and becoming a comprehensive project. Mr. Goss stated the twin cities project was already authorized by Congress and they had a preferred plan to move forward with. He reported they could not make any changes to that plan unless they put a stop to the current twin cities project and go back to the feasibility stage. Mr. Goss stated they would like to keep the project going and see if they can address any basin-wide issues in the Chehalis basin-wide general information study.

Mr. Phillips felt Councilor Barrett hit the key question that kept coming up over and over again. He stated they needed to look at the cost benefit ratio, noting the PUD indicated it could be up to \$300 million for the retention facilities. Mr. Phillips added he heard from the Corps that if the cities wanted to deal with major retention on all four of the tributaries, they would be looking at \$18 billion. He noted the latest reservoir federal proposal to come out of the Bureau of Reclamation in Eastern Washington was \$6.7 billion, or 15 cents return on every dollar spent over the life of the project.

Councilor Dawes stated he was a little worried that the basin-wide project might be put off to the side because the twin cities project was the one that received authorization. Mr. Goss reported they were doing an authorized feasibility study; however, there was no design or preferred alternative for the basin-wide plan at that time. He stated they needed input from the cities, and wanted to reach a consensus with all of the entities within the basin.

Mayor Ketchum inquired about the approximate timeframe for actually turning dirt, and wondered if there were smaller projects that could be done now. Mr. Goss indicated the project would start in 2013, and there were some other smaller dollar projects they could do on a quicker turn around; however, anything basin-wide he would have to get more information clarified.

Councilor Shannon believed any flood plan would include modifications to the Skookumchuck Dam to increase retention. He asked why they couldn't start on design and construction of that immediately. Mr. Goss reported they would be evaluating the Skookumchuck Dam as part of the 35 to 65 percent design process, adding there were issues they needed to look at.

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Mr. Phillips noted, on the general investigation side, the flood authority identified the ripe and ready projects. He stated, depending on structural proposals, the Corps had ongoing authorization for smaller projects. Mr. Phillips indicated outside the federal program there was always opportunity for the state and local governments to get together and do projects on the flood authority's list. He noted, on the basin-wide general investigation piece, both the flood authority and Grays Harbor County were partnering on the basin-wide work because the flood authority could bring state funding authorized for that particular piece.

Councilor Shannon briefly talked about the new Mellen Street interchange and the connection of Airport Road to Louisiana Avenue. He felt if they are going to consider making that road part of a levee system, now would be the time to look at it. Mr. Gernhart stated he had been to both cities over the last year to give an update on WSDOT's freeway widening project. He reported part of the project was to build a new Airport Road that would tie into the new Mellen Street overcrossing, just south of the current undercrossing. He stated in order for the new road to act as a levee, they would design the project using the Corps' standards for levees, noting it would not extend all the way south to the airport dike at this point and time. Mr. Gernhart stated they had a separate project, more than likely during the same construction start time in 2012, which was to raise Airport Road in the vicinity of the airport dike, up and over tying it into Louisiana Avenue. He noted if the Corps project moved forward, he hoped as part of the overall concept that all of Airport Road could be raised.

Mr. Gernhart reported WSDOT was not only responsible for I-5, but also for 507 (Mellen Street), which was the primary access to the hospital. He stated they were looking at designing the project in such a manner that they could actually allow, or significantly increase access to the hospital during a flood event. Mr. Gernhart indicated they were looking at different opportunities and had four or five different ideas in mind, each having their own pros and cons. He also noted the possibility of building a wall to mitigate the issue of noise, as part of the freeway widening project. Mr. Gernhart felt if they were going to build the wall it should be built in such a manner that it would be wide and strong enough to handle a flood event, and perhaps tie into the Long Road dike. He noted they were still about two and a half years away from construction, and they needed to continually look at what the flood authority and Corps was doing. Councilor Harris thanked Mr. Gernhart for their flexibility and for making the project work best for the community.

Mayor Ketchum asked if they could go and start cleaning out the various creeks in the area to try and get additional capacity. Mr. Phillips reported he had seen flood hazard reduction programs and plans that included some aspect of dredging or stream cleaning. He felt the capacity gained was important in some places where they had choke points or existing debris; however, we would have to dredge hundreds of feet down to cover even a small amount of floodplain reduction.

City Manager MacReynold asked if they could identify the members of the project coordination team. Mr. Donahue reported the members included representatives from the tribe, both cities, the county and state agencies, including the Department of Ecology and the Department of Commerce.

City Manager Sorensen asked if they would be pulling the cities in when they get close to the first 35 percent of the design phase. Mr. Donahue reported they had not yet decided whether the meeting would happen prior to the official 35 percent or immediately at the 35 percent report. He noted, in either case, convening the coordination team was an important part of that release because of the feedback needed to move forward.

Mayor Ketchum noted he appreciated Mr. Phillips' comments that the project would not go forward until they had collaboration with the local governments. Mr. Phillips stated it was fairly unusual in modern times for the state to become the local sponsor of a federal project. He noted the funding commitment rested with the role of the legislature, and they were attuned to the needs of the two cities. Mr. Phillips reported the Governor and legislators wrote into the law that not a dime of construction money could be released from that match, which meant the Corps could not use any of their federal money until the cities sign something to move forward. Mayor Ketchum stated he had complete faith that they would get something done.

Councilor Thompson believed that doing nothing was not an option. Mr. Phillips noted the state was overflowing with stories of interest in doing something after the flood. He indicated they were trying to hold everyone together to a long-term vision, but it would take a lot of political will on the parts of the two cities, the state, and Congress.

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Councilor Dawes asked if there was anyway to fast track the project, or any part of it. Mr. Phillips stated the federal government doesn't spend a lot of money on any local project without a long and deliberated pace. He believed if a major or unexpected type of event happened, the cities could ask the federal government to expedite things. Mr. Phillips felt if they could all come together they might be able to do the quicker end of construction; however, if they short-changed the process, someone out there would say they didn't think it through or would challenge the fact that they short-changed the design and evaluation process.

Councilor Thompson thanked everyone for coming to the meeting, and for answering their questions. He reported residents still remembered the flood and the councilors continue to receive questions about it everyday.

Commissioner Ron Averill commented on the upcoming open house, noting it would be a series of tables with explanations of what everybody was doing for the various projects going on in the basin. He reported the flood authority was looking at all the rivers where they had major problems, including those in Thurston and Grays Harbor Counties. Commissioner Averill stated there was a great interest on the part of the citizens to look at the upper basin, not to take away the important fact that the Centralia and Chehalis areas get water almost every time and they need to do something to provide protection. He felt they needed to keep their eyes open and look at opportunities where they could work together to come to a solution. Commissioner Averill felt it would be impossible to protect everybody, but they had to have alternatives. He reported the flood authority was very interested in making sure they had an adequate warning and evacuation system to help protect life and property.

Commissioner Averill credited Mr. Gernhart for his work, particularly on the Mellen Street area. He felt WSDOT was strongly working on a plan to keep access to the hospital open and available.

Commissioner Averill stated he deeply believed flood retention had an important role to play, and if everything worked out in the study they needed to look at it as an additive to the project.

Mayor Browning thanked everyone for coming, adding he was sure the citizens would appreciate the opportunity to listen directly to those who were helping them to make decisions.

There being no further business to come before the council, the meeting adjourned a 7:44 p.m.

Mayor

Attest:

City Clerk

SUGGESTED MOTION

I move that the council approve the minutes of the regular city council meeting of August 18, 2009.