



SEVEN-MONTH TIMEFRAME FOR CORPS TO DELIVER ITS REVIEW PLAN FOR THE METRO EAST LEVEE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT LEAVES FPD COUNCIL SKEPTICAL ABOUT MEETING FUT

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Corps' continued refusal to certify its own levees also will cost the region more time and money

Collinsville, IL., February 22, 2012 ... The Southwestern Illinois Flood Prevention District Council (FPD Council) last week finally received the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACOE) Approved Review Plan for the proposed Metro East levee improvement project, a full six months later than it was originally promised. Les Serman, chief supervisor of construction and the works for the FPD Council, noted that, while the USACOE continues to publicly promise to expedite the review process, their actions to date don't live up to that promise, nor do they provide any assurances on the future timeline for approvals.

At the February 15th board meeting of the FPD Council, Col. Chris Hall, commander of the USACOE's St. Louis District, also re-confirmed that the Corps will not be able to certify the Chain of Rocks Levee or the segment of the Wood River Levee that they are repairing as a result of damage it sustained during construction of Mel Price Locks and

Dam. He cited the Corp's internal policy that permits them only to certify entire levee systems, but not individual levees or levee segments, even if they own them or are responsible for their operations and repair.

"The Corps' unwillingness to certify their own levees is incomprehensible and will cost us yet more time and more money as it leaves us with no choice but to have our team of consultants do the certification," noted Sterman. Later in the meeting the board reluctantly authorized preliminary funding for the FPD's design/construction manager to begin the process to certify the levees in question, a process that ultimately could cost upwards of \$500,000.

Others in attendance called into question the Corps' contention that its number one priority is public safety, asking how they can legitimately talk about safety considering how long it takes them to get things done. Rich Conner, President of the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois, which administers the Levee Issues Alliance, noted that the Alliance will continue to push for policy changes at the Corps that may help to expedite the process.

Following the meeting, Madison County Board Chairman Alan Dunstan stated, "What we've seen to date gives us little confidence that things will continue to move at a pace that meets our deadlines, and every delay from this point forward threatens the public's safety because it threatens our ability to implement the locally-funded planned improvements by 2014."

Based on completion of the 60% design documents, the total cost of the project is still estimated at approximately \$160 million and, according to the Council's financial advisors, can be paid for by the money raised from the quarter-cent sales tax that was implemented in Madison, St. Clair and Monroe counties beginning in January 2009. The preliminary schedule optimally provides for construction to begin in 2012 and be substantially complete by the end of 2014, with the submittal of certification documentation to FEMA to occur in 2015.

"We've done everything possible here at the local level and are ready to move forward with this project that will create jobs, safeguard 156,000 residents and 55,000 existing jobs, and secure the economy of the area," noted St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern. "Our region cannot afford to have our plans threatened by continued bureaucratic delays."

Also of concern to Sterman is the ongoing poor communications with the Corps of Engineers, largely a result of their internal policies that result in routinely withholding essential information from the FPD Council at critical times. He cited, as an example, the lack of willingness to share any draft version of the Review Plan for any input from

the FPD Council and then a three week delay in releasing the final version, even after it was complete.

Monroe County Board Chairman Delbert Wittenauer shares Sterman's concerns. "This lack of communication is just one more challenge in this relationship with the Corps of Engineers that is adding to the schedule and cost of the project," noted Wittenauer.

Copies of the presentations made at the February 15th FPD Council board meeting are available on the FPD Council's website at www.floodpreventiondistrict.org, along with a wealth of additional information.

The St. Louis Metro East Levee Issues Alliance serves as the organizational framework for the regional, public/private effort to help prevent the unintended economic consequences produced by FEMA's update of the flood insurance rate maps in our region. While the Flood Prevention District Council is charged with improving the levees, the Alliance's growing coalition of business and civic organizations, community leaders and concerned citizens is working together to eliminate the proposed designation by FEMA of the levee-protected areas in the American Bottom as Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA) and reduce the economic damage produced by the new insurance requirements and construction restrictions.

To learn more about the Alliance efforts, visit www.stlmetroeastlevees.org. The site makes it easy for individuals and organizations to officially join the Alliance, while also providing helpful tools for those who would like to support the legislative or outreach efforts in the coming months. For more information, visit the website or contact the Leadership Council at 618-692-9745.