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# Township of Berkeley Heights Launches Infrastructure Assessment Following July 14 Storms

By Township of Berkeley Heights (Un-Named Representative) Published August 26, 2025 at 2:55 PM

BERKELEY HEIGHTS, NJ - In the aftermath of the severe storms and flooding that struck the Township and surrounding areas on July 14, 2025, Berkeley Heights has initiated an in-depth assessment of its infrastructure to evaluate where future mitigation efforts may be possible.

The Township's internal team, led by Mayor Angie Devanney, convened its latest meeting on Thursday, August 21, and is preparing an initial action plan to present to the public later in September.

The review will address a variety of questions critical to storm preparedness and flood mitigation, including:

- Identifying areas where improvements to infrastructure may be possible

- Determining what County or State stakeholders must be involved in potential projects
- Clarifying what permits may be required from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP)
- Evaluating the effectiveness of potential mitigation efforts
- Developing rough estimates of necessary hydraulic studies
- Outlining projects that may need funding in the Township's 2026 municipal budget

"Protecting both our Township's infrastructure and the property of our residents is a top priority," said Mayor Devanney. "Although the July 14 storms dropped an immense, irregular amount of rain on our region in a short amount of time – an amount no existing drainage system can handle – we are still considering all feasible mitigation efforts. We are taking a methodical approach to identify where we can make improvements, and where challenges may limit our ability to act. We want to be transparent about what can realistically be achieved, while still aggressively pursuing every option available to us."

The Township emphasized that while it is committed to pursuing all viable solutions, certain limitations exist under state law. Municipalities cannot undertake flood mitigation projects on private property, and no work can be conducted in waterways without appropriate NJDEP permits. Additionally, the State retains ownership and regulatory authority over most waterways, which means municipal actions are often dependent on coordination with State and County partners.

"Stormwater management is a highly complex issue, especially in a town like ours that sits along multiple waterways and has unique topographical challenges," Mayor Devanney added. "While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, we are committed to pursuing a path forward that provides the best possible protection for our residents within the framework of the law."

The forthcoming action plan will provide a roadmap for potential next steps, including short- and long-term recommendations. The Township will continue to keep residents informed as the process moves forward.

Meanwhile, Berkeley Heights is joining New Providence, Long Hill, and Summit - all towns along the Passaic River - in a joint effort in climate resilience planning. The Resilient NJ program, administered through DEP's Office of Climate Resilience, is providing grants of up to \$300,000 to municipalities that join with others to establish self-identified regions, and then work to develop regional Resilience Action Plans. More information on this effort will be forthcoming.

### **Storm Repair Bond Ordinance Passed: How the Money Will Be Used (And How it Won't Be)**

The Township Council on August 19 passed a \$3.5 million bond ordinance specifically for July 14 storm repairs the Township submitted to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in its damage assessment. However not all of that money necessarily will be used. We are utilizing existing leftover drainage and road repair money as applicable, before any "new" funds are borrowed from the bond ordinance.

The bond ordinance was based on extensive damage assessments conducted after the storm by experienced employees with the Township Engineering Department, Department of Public Works and Office of Emergency Management. They walked every storm-damaged area of town to document storm-specific damages. Quotes were then obtained from various contractors to do the work. It was those quotes that the bond ordinance was based on. This information gathering effort also laid the groundwork for the Township's submission to Union County and, ultimately, FEMA, in an effort to receive a disaster declaration.

The hope was FEMA would approve the State of New Jersey for disaster funds; but as of August 26, the state is falling short of the roughly \$17.6 million in submitted damages

needed to declare such a disaster. This means the Township likely will not be reimbursed for these repairs. Therefore, Council and staff may decide that only the repairs that absolutely need to be done will be done; others may have to wait until next budget year or until another funding mechanism may be found. This money will not be used for repairs unrelated to the storm, nor would it be appropriate to do so. Any additional infrastructure needs will be addressed as funds allow during the next municipal budget process, and, as usual, will be augmented with various grant awards obtained by the Township.

At that same August 19 meeting, the Council also passed a resolution hiring certain contractors to perform very specific storm-related work. All of that work is being paid for with existing funds – not any “new” money authorized for borrowing in the bond ordinance.

“I cannot say enough about our emergency management team and internal staff, who spent countless hours throughout the township to extensively document any and all storm-related damage they found to Township property,” added Mayor Devanney. “Repairs have been prioritized as needed, and we will borrow as little money as possible from this new bond ordinance, yet still ensuring we do the work needed to ensure public safety and infrastructure integrity.”

Unless FEMA issues a disaster declaration, the Township also is not eligible to submit for reimbursement any potential mitigation measures that may help alleviate future flooding. Therefore, the Township is seeking other potential avenues for mitigation funds.

### **Other Drainage Projects in Progress**

Meanwhile, the Township has been aggressively tackling drainage throughout town in the last few years in areas prone to heavy flooding, either from the Passaic River or other

sources, including the general topography of Berkeley Heights.

In the past 7 years alone, the Township has received well over \$4.5 million in federal, state and County money to assist with various drainage projects throughout the community. State and federal (past and present) elected representatives from both political parties have also assisted in some of these efforts. More details on the larger infrastructure projects and status updates can be found here.

A few of the flooding mitigation projects underway and steps currently being taken include:

- West Side Drainage Project – Phase 1, “Sawmill Stormwater Project,” currently under review by the NJ Infrastructure Bank for funding as our Engineering team works on various permit issued with the NJDEP.
- Riverbend Area Drainage Project – adding outfalls along the Passaic River at Riverbend Road to help reduce flooding; the Township is exploring possibly expanding this project – if successful – to other parts of town.
- In 2025, Township enacted a stronger stormwater management ordinance to comply with NJDEP’s enhanced standards for stormwater control. The ordinance requires stricter measures on new developments and redevelopments to improve drainage, reduce runoff, and help manage the long-term impacts of severe weather.
- For over 8 years, our Engineering Department has required homeowners to ensure they are constructing/adding stormwater mitigation measures to any larger project, including the addition of detention basins, underground pipes, or other measures, and we prohibit the discharge of sump pumps into the street.
- We do “pocket drainage projects” throughout town every year, with the help of County grants
- Green infrastructure drainage project on Orchard/Old Farm/Mercier

- The Township is involved with the Green Brook Flood Control Commission, with the Free Acres being a key area of concern, among others, along the Green Brook. The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) is performing a General Revaluation Report on the Upper Basin, which includes Berkeley Heights, Watchung, Scotch Plains and Plainfield; the USACE is expecting additional funds for this project to be approved in the next few months.
- On November 2, 2022, Berkeley Heights officials joined New Providence, Summit, Union County, the NDEP and the USACE to tour areas along the Upper Passaic River that often flood. Township leaders pointed out places that have seen serious flooding, especially during Hurricane Ida, where homes, roads, and neighborhoods were badly impacted – including, but not limited to: Shadow Lane, Riverbend Road, Robbins Ave, and Kuntz Ave. The Township is considering next steps with the USACE on how the various stakeholders can work together toward a possible solution.

“The elected officials I have worked with during my tenure as Mayor – from our local Council through to our state and federal representatives – have been extremely supportive of various drainage projects we have been doing around town to help mitigate stormwater runoff and flooding,” said Mayor Devanney. “Every Councilmember who has served during this time has recognized the importance of identifying ways to mitigate this. I am proud to say that we have had true bipartisan efforts at the local, state and federal level to assist our community in these endeavors.”