

## **By Township of Berkeley Heights**

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BERKELEY HEIGHTS, NJ - On September 26, Mayor Angie Devanney hosted a multi-jurisdictional meeting at Town Hall with representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), Union County, and neighboring municipalities including New Providence, Summit, Warren, and Long Hill. The focus: tackling worsening flooding caused by the Passaic River.

The group toured the section of the Passaic River running near Springfield Avenue, where silt buildup and debris have created “islands,” impeding water flow and worsening flood conditions. They also saw firsthand the numerous trees that have fallen into the river, contributing to the blockages. Because the Passaic River is a state-owned waterway, coordinated action across municipalities, counties, state agencies, and federal partners is essential. Plus, permits are typically required by NJDEP to do work in the waterways when using certain equipment, or when needing to access certain areas to do the work.

“The Passaic River is a major flooding issue for many of our neighboring towns, as well as towns further away,” said Mayor Angie Devanney. “Doing nothing is not the solution for Berkeley Heights. Sticking our head in the sand and hoping the problem goes away is not the solution. This is a state waterway, and the state can no longer ignore this massive problem that is causing millions of dollars of damage to our towns, destroying properties, and damaging municipal infrastructure. This should be a state and federal priority. I hope this meeting will put us on a path to an effective solution.”

### **Regional Coalition Forming to Drive Action**

Mayors, engineers or designees from Berkeley Heights, New Providence, Summit, Long Hill, Warren, and Union County will establish a coalition aimed at lobbying federal legislators for a formal USACE study, as well as county, state and federal funding for de-snagging and related flood-mitigation projects.

Key outcomes and commitments from the September 26 meeting include:

- USACE will investigate the latest river mapping and hydrology data to compare current width and depth against historical benchmarks.
- USACE & NJDEP will be asked to assign liaisons to the coalition to guide permitting questions and processes.

- Union County will explore a shared service for an amphibious machine to aid in clearing river obstructions.
- Union County will work with its river towns, NJDEP and USACE, to map out the most severe river snags, estimating costs, and creating a shared-funding model among stakeholders.

Meanwhile, Berkeley Heights continues to document portions of Township-owned waterways that could be cleared for more effective water conveyance in the various streams, brooks and other tributaries that flow through the community. The Township is only responsible for maintaining those smaller bodies of water that are on Township property; water that runs across private property is the responsibility of the homeowner.

In addition, Berkeley Heights and New Providence have joined together to apply for the Resilient NJ: Regional Assistance Program – Regional Planning Grants. Joined by other Passaic River towns such as Long Hill, Summit and Chatham, grant awards are for regional planning effort, and will go toward developing regional resilience action plans to help reduce flooding.

### **Berkeley Heights Flooding Task Force**

At the September 16 Township Council meeting, Mayor Devanney also announced the creation of the Mayor's Special Task Force on Flooding; the first meeting will be held this month.

"This idea came directly from our residents who have been most impacted by flooding in recent years, and I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to them," said Mayor Devanney. "Their input and advocacy sparked this initiative, which will allow members of government and residents to work hand-in-hand on one of the greatest challenges facing our Township. As Margaret Mead once said: 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.'"

The Flooding Task Force will:

- Review local infrastructure vulnerabilities.
- Gather input from residents.
- Recommend immediate and long-term flood-mitigation strategies.
- Support an education campaign reminding residents not to dump into easements or storm drains.

- Map Township-owned waterways and access points for future clearing, while also requiring commercial property owners to maintain their respective portions.

By combining local initiatives with a regional coalition and federal engagement, Berkeley Heights and its partners are taking the first coordinated steps toward real solutions for one of New Jersey's most pressing infrastructure and environmental challenges.