



MILTON-FREEWATER LEVEE PROJECT TEAM MINUTES

September 14, 2009

Senator David Nelson called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM. He welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Milton-Freewater Levee Project Team. Those present introduced themselves. Project Team members included: Herb Bessey, Mike Garton, Brian Wolcott, Ron Brown, Tamra Mabbott, John Stephenson, Scott Fairley, John Zerba, Bill Duke, George Ruby, Pat Vernon, Cheryl York, Eric Metz, Chris Shirley, Vern Rodighiero, George Gillette, Linda Hall, Umatilla County Commissioner Larry Givens, Milton-Freewater Mayor Lewis Key, Diane Driscoll and Jed Volkman. Others in attendance were: Gina Hartzheim, Tracy Schwarz, Jim Cain, Stan Heller, James Bill, Melanie Hall, Leanne Steadman, Kathleen Cathey, Alice Nelson, and project manager Dick Townsend.

Dick Townsend gave some information about the origins of Oregon Solutions in general, and then some history of the evolution of this Milton-Freewater levee project. George Gillette of the Milton-Freewater Water Control District (MFWCD) presented background information concerning the building of the levee, the formation of MFWCD, the problematic revenue situation and the loss of an acceptable rating for the levee.

Linda Hall, Milton-Freewater City Manager, explained that the city has officially appealed a FEMA flood map of Milton-Freewater, and that they are concerned about the safety and economic health of the citizens. Those present received a copy of the city's letter to FEMA, a letter from Senator Nelson to FEMA, and Governor Kulongoski's letter endorsing the Oregon Solutions Project for the Milton-Freewater levee.

Herb Bessey of the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) gave the history of USACE's involvement with the levee and explained the agency's cost/benefit ratio approach to projects. He discussed the concerns over structural problems that were noted in 2003. He also described the Corps' three levels of acceptance: unacceptable, minimal, and acceptable. He spoke to the problems at Nursery St. Bridge and his worry for the safety of the community. Stan Heller, also from USACE, explained that there are various funding sources from the Corps that address different concerns. Section 206 is a program that helps fund fish enhancement projects. Mr. Bessey explained that USACE is not abandoning levee improvement, but they are limited in what they can do. Their help can only come after the city and the water control district have exhausted their ability to fix the problems. Chris Shirley, from DLCD, commented that FEMA and USACE use different standards but work together. Ms. Shirley

said now that the City's appeal to FEMA has been filed, the Umatilla County mapping project is on hold until the appeal is addressed.

Brian Wolcott of the Walla Walla River Watershed Council (WWRWC) gave a slide presentation in which he pointed to the places along the river that need to be addressed in order for the levee to meet the USACE requirements. He described which fish are native to the river, how the increase in river flow is due in part to the agricultural community's efforts toward developing different sources for irrigation, and how vegetation affects water temperature which is an important consideration for fish. During discussion, Mr. Bessey explained USACE rules about vegetation and stated they could vary depending on changes in the design of the structures. Jed Volkman of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) explained that while he is concerned about the fish, he does not believe that trees should be kept if their removal would increase the safety of the citizens of Milton-Freewater. There was some discussion about redesigning the levee in a way that would increase its sustainability.

There was discussion about the implications for flood insurance costs should the levee not be fixed. Tamra Mabbot from Umatilla County asked how the levee maintenance plan is developed and Mr. Gillette explained that the M-FWCD follows a USACE handbook. Tracy Schwartz of USACE explained that final decisions of whether or not levee projects are federally funded rests with Congress. Ron Brown, a local businessman, said the levee and river problems are multifaceted and the entire system must be considered when changes are proposed. He raised concerns about losing a bridge should the flood waters escape the existing levee. There was much agreement that the levee problem involves multiple and interconnected issues. There was discussion about cooperation between federal agencies and what kinds of time lines were being considered for this project. Dick Townsend said he anticipates the Project Team will be working toward a Declaration of Cooperation over the next 4-6 months. Mr. Gillette was asked to list the main repairs needed to meet USACE standards. He said there are five main problems: 1) the drop structure; 2) holes in the stilling basin; 3) down cutting of one bank on the levee; 4) a scouring area at Couse Creek; and 5) removing vegetation from several areas. He estimated the cost for these projects at \$850,000-\$1.25 mil.

The group was asked to submit their ideas for a goal statement for the project. Many of those present offered ideas. Balancing the needs of safety and wildlife; planning for sustainability; looking at short and long term solutions; addressing safety, economic and environmental concerns; improving health of the river system and gaining a greater understanding of how it works; and meeting the requirements of the regulating agencies were mentioned by many in the group. Mr. Townsend asked if there was anyone who could not live with the following goal statement: Repair and maintain the Milton-Freewater Water Control District Walla Walla River flood control structures while incorporating environmental and community economic values. He said he would rework the wording to more accurately reflect today's discussion and incorporate wording that had been offered by Tamra Mabbot and Herb Bessey. A revised goal statement would be brought back to the next Project Team meeting.

Senator Nelson asked whether other parties might need to be added to the project team. BPA and FEMA were both mentioned as was the road supervisor for Umatilla County. There was discussion about conflicting information concerning FEMA timelines and flood insurance estimates. It was decided that

Chris Shirley, Linda Hall, Tamra Mabbot and Dick Townsend would work together to find answers to these questions. It was also suggested that the City could develop some risk analysis information.

Mr. Townsend suggested forming a subcommittee that could work on some of the issues and bring information back to the project team at the next meeting. George Gillette, John Zerba, Scott Fairley, John Stephenson, Tamra Mabbott, Brian Wolcott, Herb Bessey and Chris Shirley offered to make up this committee. Dick Townsend asked that BPA representative Sarah Branum be added to the work-group. Senator Nelson asked Brian Wolcott to chair the group with Mr. Townsend acting as staff. There was consensus for the appointments and that the subcommittee is a good way to proceed.

It was suggested that the next project team meeting take place in October when a FEMA representative could attend.

Senator Nelson adjourned the meeting at 3:45 PM.