

Open Work Session
Overview of Nuisance Flood Plan
November 17, 2020

Ms. Marilyn Williams, Land Development Coordinator, and Mr. Lorenzo Cropper, Emergency Planner, came before Council. Ms. Williams said she is here to talk about their recently filed Nuisance Flood Plan. She said this plan came about because the Maryland Legislature passed a law in 2019 entitled Sea Level Rise, Inundation, and Coastal Flooding Construction, Adaptation, and Mitigation that charged the CoastSmart Council, which was developed in 2014 by a similar Bill, with certain responsibilities in preparing the State for sea-level rise and preventing damage to life and property in the State of Maryland. She said it also gave the CoastSmart Council the responsibility to establish certain guidelines for State funded construction projects, and it charged the Departments of Planning, Natural Resources, and Environment with developing and publishing guidelines to assist local jurisdictions in the collection of data to establish nuisance flooding baselines. She said, in that Section, they also charged any local jurisdiction with nuisance flooding to develop a plan to address it. She said they have to update the plan every five years, and publish the plan on their website, which they have done under the Department of Emergency Services. She said the Bill did not include a definition of nuisance flooding, but the guidance document established through those three agencies defined nuisance flooding as hightide flooding that causes a public inconvenience, and, in Wicomico County, that inconvenience is generally roads being inundated by hightides. She said the State established three critical components the plan needed to include, which were an inventory of known flood hazard areas; identification of flood thresholds, which means they needed to tell them what causes nuisance flooding in Wicomico County; and a mechanism to document the flooding events from now through 2025 when their plan will be updated.

Ms. Williams said their approach was to first define what nuisance flooding is in Wicomico County, what events cause it, where it occurs, whether it can be prevented, and how they will communicate upcoming events to the citizens of Wicomico County, so that is where they developed their Nuisance Flood Plan. She said they identified that road flooding is really their nuisance flooding, and their sources of flooding come from the Nanticoke and Wicomico Rivers, and the many creeks and tidal tributaries coming off of those two waterways. Mr. Holloway said Ms. Williams forgot to mention 6 inches of rain because that is their big problem with flooding, to which Ms. Williams responded, yes, it is, but in this plan they are charged with tidal flooding, so that is a whole other stormwater plan that can be addressed separately.

Ms. Williams reported, they identified three different levels of flooding – minor, moderate, and major, and these are all bases because this is the first time this plan has been established. She said they are calling minor flooding less than 6 inches of water in the roadway received within 6 to 12 hours. She said the good part about tidal flooding is that it is temporary. She clarified, the tides will come in, they will flood, and then they will leave. She said they are calling moderate flooding 6 inches to 2 feet, and major flooding greater than 2 feet in a roadway. She said their extreme nuisance flooding occurs with extreme hightides, lunar events, and south-southwest wind is a really strong factor for them in nuisance flooding because it pushes the water up the Bay and into the rivers and all the tributaries. She said a north-nor'easter storm does the same thing because it wraps around and pushes the water up the Bay.

Ms. Williams said they had to address sea-level rise and at least mention what it is and how it affects Wicomico County. She said they live in an area that within the next 30 years they are to expect between 0.8 and 1.6 feet of sea-level rise with a 66 percent probability, which came from an extensive State plan. She said they needed to do their inventory, and she is proud to say they are only one of two jurisdictions that actually did everything they were supposed to, which she found out from talking to the person who reviews the plans. She said they actually set what is minor, moderate, and major flooding in Wicomico County, and these are just baselines, so they may need to tweak them over time, but they define minor flooding at 1.5-2.0 feet of hightide, moderate flooding at 2.0-2.8 feet of hightide, and major flooding at greater than 2.8 feet of hightide, which was based on documenting some of these events last year. She said, using the tools available to them, they could see what the tides and winds were on those days, and took pictures of the flooding, so they were able to come up with this as a baseline. She said then they inventoried their roads, and there is a table in the Nuisance Flood Plan that lists all the roads identified as having regular nuisance flooding, what their flooding source is, and any remarks. She said they then discussed mitigation efforts that have occurred or are occurring in different areas, and then discussed how they are going to monitor these flooding events, and how they are going to communicate to the public. She said the Executive's Office posted on Facebook that they will be using a quarterly report by NOAA, and will report particular dates when extreme hightides are expected. She said they are going through one of those events right now until the 20th, so they just put the dates identified out there knowing, if any weather events come during this time period, it will exacerbate the situation. She said they will communicate this through social media, but also will participate in a new program that just came out since they put out their plan called My Coast Maryland, and she has copies for Council. She explained, the CoastSmart Council came up with a way to participate in this national program, but now they are participating in Maryland, so if she is out and about and sees a flooding event going on, she can download the app mycoast.org and take a picture and upload it, and by GPS it will be able to tell where she is, and it will add a report on the program. She said they will pull that report from their own data and be able to look at wind speed at that location on that day and time, what the rainfall was in the last 24 hours, the water level tide-wise, and what was predicted. She said they often find that what NOAA and DNR predict in their tides are actually much lower than what they experience, especially if they have a wind or weather event, so this will be a really important tool for their plan, and for the State.

Ms. Williams explained, with this plan, they just get comments back, so it is not like a graded plan, it is just something they had to do. She clarified, they have not gotten their comments back yet, but she talked to the person at DNR who does the comments, and they are not even sure what they are going to do with all of these plans, so she said they are just going to work with it over the next couple of years to try to figure out what they are going to do, and how they are going to use the information.

Mr. Cannon thanked Ms. Williams for being one of the few to actually turn in this plan, and said that is great for the County as well. Ms. Williams clarified, a lot of people turned it in, they just did not address what level they are experiencing it. Mr. Cannon asked if the municipalities are required to do their own flood plans, to which Ms. Williams responded, yes, this plan is only for Wicomico County, and does not include any townships. She said every single jurisdiction that experiences nuisance flooding was to have done something, so they contacted all the townships within the County, and if they did not experience any tidal flooding, they wrote a letter saying they do not experience that, so that was their response. She said the City of Salisbury has their own plan, and Sharptown was kind of on the edge, but decided

they only experience a little bit of flooding in Cherry Beach Park, and not really roadway flooding. She said all of the townships did what they needed to do, and informed the State they do not really have any flooding issues.

Mr. Dodd thanked Ms. Williams for the presentation and said she did a great job. He then asked when this nuisance plan started, to which Ms. Williams responded, it was originally supposed to be submitted last October, but a lot of the jurisdictions said they needed more time, so they extended it to October of this year. She explained, this is the first one, so they are just going to kind of tweak it as they go along.


Mr. Dodd asked Mr. Cropper if Emergency Management responds to the flooding incidents, to which Mr. Cropper responded, yes, if they are called out. Mr. Dodd asked if they have to be called out before they respond, to which Mr. Cropper responded, or if they have knowledge of it. Mr. Dodd said Council met with the previous Public Works Director and received regular updates on flooding, and flooding has been pretty severe in Wicomico County. He said, touching on what Mr. Holloway said, when they have the tidal floods and then the stormwater coming in, it can be very disastrous. He then asked if they are working with Public Works on this, to which Ms. Williams responded, it really has helped having their engineering department on the same floor, and they really work with each other a lot now, and they address more of the stormwater aspects of the nontidal flooding. There was no further discussion.




Larry W. Dodd, President, District 3



John T. Cannon, Vice President, At-Large



Ernest F. Davis, District 1



Nicole Acle, District 2



Josh Hastings, District 4



Joe Holloway, District 5



William R. McCain, At-Large



Laura Hurley, Council Administrator