

Flood Commission Looking to Ease the Threat of Flooding

By Glenn Graves

WALTON — In an effort to lessen the impact of flooding in the village and town of Walton, a flood commission was established about six months ago to identify areas of concern and projects that might reduce the incidence of floods and their damage. A joint partnership between the village and town, the commission also has members that represent the Delaware County Department of Watershed Affairs, the county Department of Economic Development, the county Planning Board, New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District (DC-SWCD), which first suggested the idea to the municipalities and is facilitating the effort.

Graydon Dutcher, Stream Management Program director at DC-SWCD, said the idea is to address issues in Walton's four watersheds - East Brook, West Brook, Third Brook and the west branch of the Delaware River. He said that with four different flood plains in the village, there are many different physical properties, considerations and obstacles. He said with a community-based group, such as this, identifying and implementing projects and programs and educating the residents as to the reasoning for them should increase the likelihood of some successes. "We want to get to where we're all working toward the same goal," he said. "In the past, we've had people who simply thought the best solution to flooding is dredging a larger channel. We now know that isn't always a solution, but often creates greater problems. We need to work with them to determine which debris is helpful and which is detrimental."

Dutcher said that the commission has been involved in the planning of some projects that were granted mitigation funding, such as those at West Brook and Third Brook in the village and at Beers Brook and Pines Brook in the town.

He said one responsibility of the commission is to look for opportunities to restore some flood plains, so spilling brooks and streams have a place to overflow, without causing excessive damage. He said the project to restore the floodplain for West Brook, behind the Country Store, is an example and may spare the businesses on Delaware Street from some flooding. "We know we can't prevent all flooding," Dutcher said. "But, we may be able to eliminate or lessen some of the damage done by minor floods."

Dutcher said the commission has already begun studying how to restore the floodplain between Water Street and the west branch, some of which was lost when the grade was raised to build the dollar stores. "We see the need to create an avenue for water to get behind our Delaware Street businesses and back to the river," Dutcher said. "There are places throughout the village where we can reclaim floodplains."

Dutcher said that each time a structure is built in a floodplain, which often requires fill to lift it above danger from flooding, it lessens the volume of water a floodplain can contain. He said that if you have a bucket half full of water and start tossing in golf balls, eventually the bucket will spill over, although no additional water has been added. "It may not seem like much if you put up a shed here, a shed there, but if everybody tosses in a golf ball here and there..."

Dutcher said that after the Oct. 1 flooding, it was recommended by a commission member to have the water gage at the Walton Fairgrounds moved to the Bridge Street bridge, where it would be highly visible, "so the fire chief, police or emergency services can tell how fast the water is coming up between East and Third brooks."

Dutcher said the commission is looking for other ways to improve the ecosystem, help businesses, improve the health of the streams and promote education. He said the commission is going to encourage school children to help monitor the gravel deposits in streams and under bridges to develop an understanding of hydrology and to have some of the government classes looking at floodplain regulations, so they can better understand their design and function. He said that getting the children involved may increase their parents' involvement. "We're thinking how the recycling effort first became successful - by convincing the kids to recycle, who, in turn, convinced their parents of its value."

Dutcher said the new flood maps that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is preparing will increase the number of properties in Walton that are in the floodplains and require flood insurance. He said that may prompt some more people to want to get involved in floodplain management, as well. "The community holds the cards," he said. "It's just a matter of getting everybody on board and working together."

Dutcher said the commission would welcome village residents to join. "We want everyone to understand how to alleviate flood risks and recognize flood plains as an asset," he said. "Every flood doesn't have to be a disaster."

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