

Laura Hicks, CENWP-PM
USACE

January 25, 2020

Dear Ms Hicks,

First, let me applaud you and your team for your professional demeanor and good humor at the public meeting on January 23rd. I would not have your job for all the tea in China.

A couple of points that I need to make regarding our specific situation.

I'm sure a significant element of the age range at the meeting was not lost on you and your cohort. The Bridgeton community and in particular, the floating home contingent is almost entirely composed of "boomers" or older folks. I'm nearly eighty. My wife and I are long retired, on a fixed income and living on the river because it's a pleasant, stimulating environment and one we could afford, given the astronomical price of homes in Portland. It is a swell place to live for those who like something a little different, despite it's obvious drawbacks in terms of isolation and unusual maintenance issues. We've lived on the river five years and had planned to live in our little house as long as our health permitted and then use the investment in this property to fund the next step in residential arrangements, whether that turned out to be a retirement home or some other situation dictated by health concerns. We rather carefully planned this. We are one of the slip owning residents: initial costs were higher, but the conventional wisdom was that owning the slip would make the house more attractive for a buyer. At sale, a house with an owned slip commands a commensurately higher price than a house with a monthly slip rental fee. My wife and I are not alone in having done that calculus. Every owner in our HOA is essentially in the same boat. Pun intended.

Our late-life strategy has now been severely damaged, if not entirely destroyed by the actions of your agency. Though no final decision on options has been reached nor single hole has been dug, we have already taken a huge hit. We could not find a market price buyer for this home now, period. It gives me no comfort to think that we are simply collateral damage, or victims of the laws of unintended consequences.

I was struck by the utter disregard, in fact complete absence of any of the costs borne by residential property owners in your cost/benefit analysis.

Your preference for Option 5, as you explained, was based on its higher net benefit to the larger community. You mentioned recreational values, greater property security in the city...etc. etc. Entirely missing from your comments was any dollar figure or mention of costs/losses for the most directly impacted residents. These are easily quantifiable economic values, unlike the mountain of modeling projections and other hypothetical numbers that filled up your charts. I recall there was one line in the charts for "Real Estate". There was no mention of how or by whom this "Real Estate" value was determined or to what end. You talked about how extensive had been your team's research, that you'd talked to business owners, property owners, marinas, etc. etc. Stakeholders. Well, your team has not said word one to me. Nor to any of my neighbors. We are most definitely affected property owners. Who do you think paid for the property on the north side of Bridgeton Rd? Every slip that is owned has a corresponding lot that is not under water. The slip and the lot are sold as a unit. The value of the slip is directly tied to the plot on dry land. Almost as an afterthought, when it was brought up by one of our number, you opined that the issue of parking would need further review and discussion. Absent from the focus on "parking" is the fact that the loss of parking is but one consequence of your plan. Lose the dry land parcel and the value of the associated slip is automatically radically diminished. I heard someone say, whether an informed comment or not, that the project had money allocated to compensate owners for lost parking. What in the world will we do with a few thousand dollars if our houses are all but worthless?

A word about the process for public comment.

A young man came to my door with a flyer in the late fall. He was somewhat reluctant to comment on the actual event the flyer announced, except to say that "they were planning to raise the levee with a four foot wall". He said there would be a public comment period and then he left to continue distributing flyers. We had already purchased our places at a week-long music workshop in Utah that prevented us from attending the first meeting on this proposal. I have talked to many of my neighbors. They did not even receive that first flyer. One would think, that an agency with hundreds of millions to spend, would, as a matter of good public policy, put together a more robust solicitation of information from those most directly

affected. Unless, of course, as one is led to suspect, the project wasn't really interested in what they might hear.

Since that time, we have talked among ourselves about the impact of the project, speculated, traded gossip and generally operated in a fog until the last two weeks. Now we are in the position of scrambling to articulate our many concerns in a few weeks? And this is our one shot to make our concerns known? We've only had the maps and charts for a couple of weeks. We aren't a coherent organization, we're a neighborhood. What confidence can we have in a decision making process that spent, if I heard correctly, FOUR YEARS assembling the data, modeling and drafting options and then allocated FIVE WEEKS and a few public meetings to listening to those most immediately affected!?

Couple of thoughts and then a recommendation.

My wife and I are being forced to re-evaluate our plans for how best to use what resources we can salvage and how to adjust to this destruction of our previously settled strategy. How to cope with caring for an autistic adult child and still actually live in reasonable security without the counted-on nest egg that is tied up in this residence. We are, to some degree, flying blind. Whether to spend our very limited money to retain individual legal counsel or to pool resources with others in the same fix? Should we try to sell now, at a sacrificial price and gamble that even with the disclosure of this impending nightmare, we can find a buyer? Our neighbors, with many variations, are wrestling with the same questions. The general mood is not one of "wait and see"... "surely they know what they are doing"... "they won't actually do anything to harm us"... "surely they'll take our situation into consideration"... I regret to report, there is much alarm and stress. It is very dispiriting to discover that a powerful taxpayer supported agency, staffed by observably nice, honorable people and charged with keeping us safe from natural disaster, is perfectly sanguine with bringing upon us economic disaster, more devastating than a flood. There is, after all, insurance against the ravages of a flood.

An observation about the "recreational" nature of this neighborhood. The boaters who rent slips are our recreational element. There is absolutely no correspondence between visiting your slip to maintain your boat and perhaps take it out for an afternoon sail every few weeks during the

summer and living in a floating home 24/7/365. Period. The needs of marina slip renters and floating home owners are completely different, in every respect. The slip renters won't be inconvenienced very much by the flood wall, as long as they can find somewhere to park for the few hours they are on their boat. Residents, on the other hand, will have their daily lives completely turned upside down. How are you at carrying every item you use in your house a couple of blocks, in the rain or snow, and up and down a seventy foot ramp, not to mention your garbage bags and recycling? And any furniture, or services that require work trucks? Plumbers, electricians, that sort of thing? Will they charge an increased rate or simply decline to serve our community? The median age of your cohort at the meeting was, I am guessing, in the forties. As I mentioned, I'm seventy nine, my wife will be seventy one in a few weeks, my immediate neighbors are all in their late sixties or seventies and some older. I revisit the age issue, because this project has forced we who float on the river to confront the prospect of totally reorganizing our lives at an age when that is progressively less desirable, manageable or even in some cases possible. One of our number is recovering from hip replacement and was planning to put her home on the market as soon as she was mobile again. This project has effectively trapped her with diminishing resources. It will give her no comfort to be reminded of the laws of unintended consequences.

A recommendation:

Option 5 is, whatever your cost/benefit prognostications, is the most devastating to our community. The irony of showing us slides of the scenic and recreational virtues of various walls was not lost on your audience. We know when we're being patronized. You're familiar, I'm sure with the aphorism, "putting lipstick on a pig"? A concrete wall down the middle, or to one side or the other, of Bridgeton Rd is a wrecking ball through our community. Period. We cannot escape massive economic impact. I am certain that if you plugged even a fraction of the losses by homeowners into your equation, Option 5 would not pencil out any better than Option 4. And just for an anecdotal observation, we drove through the latter stages of the lower Missouri flooding last summer. A close friend lives in Boonville. A three foot wall on the top of those levees would have done absolutely nothing to prevent flooding which reached nearly a hundred miles into

country that had never, in modern recorded history, flooded. In another vein, I was not surprised and not amused either by the finding that the wall would have no environmental impact. Somehow, we've come to the sorry pass where the basic purposes of the EPA are either ignored, circumvented or blatantly violated. How is it possible that an impervious concrete and steel barrier, fifteen feet down in a river bank could have no environmental impact? And you are somewhat dependent on the voluntary assent and cooperation of the railroad in making this levee system viable at the costs you project? What happens if the RR says heck no? And you're forced to build the parallel levee? Does Option 5 still pencil out as the most cost effective? Also...how come they get to say yay or nay and we're basically presented with a fait accompli?

So Option 4, which satisfies many of the same requirements, short of actually raising the Pen 2 section from thirty six to thirty nine feet, but which does not cost my family several hundred thousand dollars, is my choice. Can you understand why? I am too old to sit by and just "take one for the team"...the "team" long ago abandoned me and oldsters like me. If the net beneficiary is the safety of the city of Portland, why am I charged with bearing the cost of their increased safety? Doesn't this community thing cut both ways? Doesn't increased security cost money? Paid by the beneficiaries of the increased security? Isn't there a value exchange here? The irony in all this, is that for the time I have lived here, I have paid property taxes at a higher rate, square foot for square foot, than the average Portland homeowner. Now I'm expected to simply suffer the loss of my property value in order to make the greater community safer? One way to look at this, is that a government agency is simply stealing my investment to fund the greater safety of parties with no immediate stake in the event, who will feel no impact either way, until a hypothetical five hundred year flood. I think the project catch phrase is "the next fifty years..." Portlanders will be totally indifferent or perhaps think it's a nice thing that the Corps of Engineers takes such pains to protect them. In any case, they certainly won't be aware of the huge and punitive costs to their river neighbors. Meanwhile, my wife and I will almost surely be trying to figure out a way to live out our lives without the security of a retirement home or health care facility.

A final observation.

I queried Mr. Wilcox, a very pleasant and patient member of your team, about the absence from your presentation of any real comment on the efficacy of adjusting flood management protocols throughout the upriver system. There were three lines that contained the words, Flood Control, but no actual elaboration, only general goals. There are TWELVE dams of varying sizes and purpose on this river and its tributaries. Has this avenue been thoroughly explored, prior to deciding on further down-stream hardening? (Of course, given the present balance of forces, political and economic, the interests of irrigation and power generation are a demanding challenge. Individual homeowners are a lot easier to push around. It's a lot simpler to just pour another concrete wall.) Mark Wilcox offered some hurried and sketchy explanations, but no solid confirmation as to whether adjusting flood control strategies at the dams had ever really been explored, other than by computer modeling. I realize the meeting was breaking up and flood control is a vast and highly technical subject. He gave me his card. We will definitely be seeking more elaboration on this subject.

I suspect there are laws in place that allow the ACOE to do whatever it damned well pleases. That fact does not make a particular action right, just, equitable or fair.. I am old enough to remember those words as aspirational in the American experience.

Respectfully submitted,

Patrick & Valerie Tovatt
173 NE Bridgeton Rd Slip 8
Portland, OR 97211

541 326 7461

