

**August 3, 2006
Meeting Minutes****Location**

6th Floor Legislative Conference Room, Broome County Office Building, 44 Hawley Street, Binghamton, NY

Attendance

Constituent Members: Supervisor Debbie Preston, Town of Conklin; Supervisor Peter Andreasen, Town of Vestal; Supervisor Mike Marinaccio, Town of Dickinson; Lois Dilworth, Town of Barker; Ed Banks, Town of Fenton; Mayor Joan Hickey Pulse, Village of Endicott; Mayor Matthew Ryan, City of Binghamton; Mayor Kevin Burke, Village of Port Dickinson; County Executive Barbara Fiala, Broome County; Supervisor Gordon Kniffen, Town of Kirkwood; Supervisor Richard Bensley, Town of Triangle; Daria Golazeski, Village of Johnson City

Associate Members: Jim Dimascio, Greater Binghamton Coalition

Other Attendees: Patrick Brennan and Darcy Fauci, Broome County Executive's Office; Rita Petkash and Jeremy Evans, Broome County Department of Planning and Economic Development; Clare Simeone, League of Women Voters; Tom Sinclair, Binghamton University MPA Program; Peter Olevano and Lou Caforio, Town of Union; Oliver Blaise; Mike Aswad, Broome County Emergency Services; Al Bomysoad and Gary O'Neill, Broome County Sheriff; Jerry Marinich, Broome County Legislature; Liz Hacken, Press & Sun Bulletin; Lew Grubham, Town of Kirkwood; Catherine Glover, Greater Binghamton Chamber; Rich Dilworth; Henry Weissmann, Broome County Public Works; Kathy Bevelacqua, Broome County Division of Budget & Research

Convene

Supervisor Michael Marinaccio convened the meeting at 4:03 PM.

County Executive Barbara Fiala announced that the County has offered to manage the property acquisition program for the most recent flooding. New York State is providing funding to cover the local portion of the costs (the remainder is funded by FEMA). The County will submit a letter of intent by August 14 detailing what properties municipalities wish to acquire.

Commissioner Rita Petkash said that some eligibility requirements have been waived and that the municipalities need to get the county planning department a count of how many properties need to be acquired [Editor's note: A copy of the grant announcement is attached to all minutes

sent to chief elected officials]. She also talked about the Temporary Assistance Grant that the county has applied for through the Governor's Office for Small Cities. The grant will provide individuals up to \$2,500 and cover expenses not otherwise covered by other grant programs. Supervisor Debbie Preston added that the grant can be used for rent, furniture, and utility payments.

Supervisor Gordon Kniffen mentioned that he was concerned about the \$5,000 individual grant from the New York State Emergency Management Office (SEMO). Residents in Kirkwood were still waiting for their checks. Supervisor Preston confirmed that the State was way behind on mailing out checks. She said that the State shouldn't need to confirm property damage if FEMA has already done it. Due to pressure, the State will be sending out checks faster. The State is also increasing the amount of information about the status of individual applications available on the information hotline.

Supervisor Kniffen had also heard that if an individual applies for an SBA loan that he/she is no longer eligible for FEMA or SEMO assistance. That turned out to be incorrect. Supervisor Preston confirmed that you are eligible but what you receive from SEMO and FEMA will be deducted from what you may receive from SBA.

Supervisor Marinaccio then did a role call of Constituent Members. There were fourteen municipalities represented. He congratulated Supervisor Preston for being the first elected official to receive the Jefferson Award. He reminded the Council that the meeting was dedicated to flood issues, to talk about what was done right and what was done wrong. He took the opportunity to congratulate a number of people and organizations including Mike Aswad and Broome County Emergency Services, Sheriff Harder and the Sheriff's Department, Alan Hertel and NYSEG, local and outside fire departments, and all of the municipalities and their crews, including the County Administration. He also thanked the media and the many charitable organizations in Broome County.

County Executive Fiala announced that the County is forming a flood task force to address the on going issues related to the flood. There are going to be long term effects and volunteers are still needed. The task force will allow the community to act with one voice and would be a good lobbying group. The task force would include municipal leaders, relief agencies, and the business community as well. Executive Assistant Darcy Fauci added that group would meet beginning the following week.

Supervisor Marinaccio said that municipalities have been sharing services and it was no different during the flood. They were on the phone with each other and helping each other out.

Supervisor Preston also expressed thanks for everything the County did to help out. She thought the National Guard would help out with debris removal but it didn't. If they could have helped with debris removal, her highway crews could have been working on road repair.

Emergency Services Director Mike Aswad was impressed because supervisors and mayors took the initial warnings seriously.

Supervisor Marinaccio said that everything that emergency services predicted actually happened. Their sound predictions gave Dickinson 12-14 hours of preparation time.

Supervisor Preston noted that there were no casualties from the event in Broome County, which proves that there was a good response from emergency services.

Deputy County Executive Pat Brennan mentioned that SEMO is applying for a crisis counseling grant from FEMA. If approved, there will be people talking to flood victims to find out if they have filled out all their paperwork and to see if anyone needs mental health assistance.

Supervisor Marinaccio asked the Sheriff's Department there was anything else that could have been done to prepare for the disaster. Captain Albert Bomysoad said that there was a lot of preparation and not a lot could have been done differently because of the huge size of the disaster. Undersheriff Gary O'Neill said that the Sheriff's Department focused on limiting access and securing damaged roads. With more resources the Department could have done more to enforce the Emergency Declaration. He also mentioned that the Division of Corrections was used in ways that they haven't been used before to help out. Inmates are still helping with clean up.

Supervisor Kniffen told Supervisor Preston that her efforts did not go unnoticed. He also thanked Lou Grubham of the Kirkwood town council for managing the town until he could get back. He also thanked Broome County Public Works Commissioner Henry Weissmann for his help. He restated his concern about the SEMO checks. He also said that he realized that FEMA was an organization that only helped people immediately after a disaster. They are not around for the long-term. He was disappointed that only a few people in Kirkwood are going to qualify for FEMA trailers.

Supervisor Preston said that the county and the State did a good job. She thought that FEMA did a good job helping municipalities but that it does not do a good job helping individuals.

Mayor Matthew Ryan suggested that everyone should get together and hire a company with ex-FEMA employees on staff that can make sure that FEMA is doing what they are supposed to and that people get all of the help they deserve. Supervisor Preston said that the area's Senators and Congressmen need to make sure things are done correctly. Assemblyman Clifford Crouch suggested that municipalities put pressure on the two Senators and Congressmen Hinchey and Boehlert to make sure FEMA does things right. He said he has been working hard on different flood-related issues as well. County Executive Fiala reiterated the importance of having a task force in place to deal with all of the issues that still need to be addressed.

Supervisor Marinaccio brought up the issue of taxes. He mentioned that school property tax bills will soon be due for residents who have lost all the value of their property. Assemblyman Crouch said that he is working on legislation to address this issue. He hopes that a bill can be passed that would allow homeowners to receive a reassessment if their homes have been

damaged. The State also needs to help out the towns and schools and hold them harmless from the lost revenue. He said a precedent was set after the April 2005 flood to help property owners.

Supervisor Peter Andreasen said that he sent letters to state and federal representatives urging them to provide property tax relief to affected property owners [Editor's Note: Copies of these letters are attached to minutes sent to chief elected officials]. He urged all of Broome County's elected officials to get together as one voice to get some attention. He also noted that during the Upstate New York ice storm several years ago, HUD deferred mortgage payments for a limited amount of time. He would like to see something similar occur in Broome County. Supervisor Preston said the NYS Attorney General made a low-key visit to the area and said he would work with banks on lending issues regarding the flooding. Banks were being really tough.

Supervisor Andreasen said that municipal budgets are in shambles and that in many cases he has to tell residents that the Town of Vestal can't help them [with certain flood-related issues] but he will let them know when help is available from other places.

Assemblyman Crouch said he is working to tweak the property tax bill to push back the due date of school taxes. Supervisor Kniffen asked the Assemblyman if he was working on finding ways to help municipalities come up with funds to pay for flood costs since municipalities cannot borrow money. Assemblyman Crouch responded that he was.

Supervisor Marinaccio asked if other municipalities had needs or wanted to bring up flood-related issues. Mayor Joan Hickey Pulse said that she met with FEMA. The Endicott sewage treatment plant sustained \$500,000 in damage but that overall, the Village was very lucky. She commended her department heads for carrying out their emergency response plan.

Supervisor Andreasen mentioned that a lot of residents will have to completely rebuild their homes. The question is how much they will have to raise their rebuilt homes. Vestal worked with FEMA and told all of the affected property owners how much they would have to raise their homes. Supervisor Preston added that in Conklin, some residents will have to raise their homes six feet.

Several Council members speculated on the effect the flooding would have on businesses.

Daria Golazeski, Village Planner for Johnson City, said that the Village had 400 properties affected. She said that there was heavier damage in the B flood zone than in the A flood zone. The Village is requesting that those organizations that provided mutual aid assistance send a bill so that they can get reimbursed for their efforts.

Mayor Ryan expressed concern that FEMA might try to cut back on promised aid as time passes and also added that there is no reason that we shouldn't be able to take care of our citizens. The Federal government needs to get its priorities straight and provide more money. Supervisor Preston added that she talked to Congressman Maurice Hinchey and asked him to show the Federal government and the Administration how regular Americans live and survive during a disaster and said we should be taking care of our own instead of other countries.

Supervisor Ed Banks addressed the issue of debris removal in creeks. He argued that DEC needs to loosen control over removal of debris from all of the small creeks. Much of the damage from flash flooding in the rural towns like Fenton was a result of debris clogging culverts. Supervisor Ted Woodward said that the Town of Maine received temporary permission to clean creeks out. Assemblyman Crouch cited the example of Walton where three streams come together. Within ten minutes a box culvert got plugged up and the water jumped the road and moved a car near the Kraft plant. He said that long term mitigation, with cooperation between DOT and DEC needs to occur.

Mr. Aswad asked mayors and supervisors to consider establishing an emergency operations center within the town or village during an emergency. An EOC makes it a lot easier to assess resources and needs because there is one source of information.

Assemblyman Crouch added that a lot of time and energy was wasted from false alarms. He also thanked highway and emergency services personnel for the fantastic job they did during the flood.

Mr. Jeremy Evans from Broome County Planning Department reminded the Council that all municipalities were involved in the development of an all-hazard mitigation plan. He urged the supervisors and mayors to make sure that their representatives attended the committee meetings. An approved hazard mitigation plan is required to receive hazard mitigation grants for projects such as property buyouts. He also mentioned that the Department has added the estimated flood boundary to its online interactive mapping application. The boundary was created by NYSEG and they have been very kind in allowing the Planning Department to use it for public benefit. The mapping application can be viewed at www.bcgis.com.

Mayor Ryan suggested that a full assessment of the disaster response be completed so that we could learn from it. He also said that other disasters needed to be looked at like heat and ice storms. Mr. Aswad answered that the County does have plans to respond to different types of disasters but that individual municipalities can have their own plans in place.

Supervisor Preston announced that the next meeting would be held in September.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 5:35 PM

Recorded and edited by: Jeremy Evans

Approved by: Debra A. Preston