

Updates on the New Meadowlands Rebuild By Design Project

Do you care about the Meadowlands, flood protection, or stormwater pollution? If you answered yes, then you may be interested in what's happening with the "New Meadowlands" project! While the idea behind the project has been around for a few years now, there are still no set project plans. That may soon change, however, as the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) and its consultant, AECOM, are currently preparing a Draft Environmental Impact Statement that will identify a "preferred alternative" for the New Meadowlands project. Thus, now is a great time to get involved! And, as explained below, Hackensack Riverkeeper would appreciate our supporters telling NJDEP that ***Alternative 2, or the "Stormwater Drainage Improvement Alternative," should be the preferred approach.***

Background

In response to Superstorm Sandy, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development launched Rebuild By Design, a design competition to develop innovative proposals that would promote resiliency in communities affected by Superstorm Sandy. New Jersey was awarded \$150 million from the Rebuild By Design competition for a storm resiliency project in the Meadowlands District, known as the New Meadowlands project. The project is intended to provide flood risk protection to the communities of Little Ferry, Moonachie, Carlstadt, Teterboro, and South Hackensack.

Project Alternatives

The project, as it is currently devised, could take the shape of one of three alternatives. Alternative 1, the "Structural Flood Reduction Alternative," would involve installing structural flood reduction measures, i.e. a series of levees, berms, barriers, or floodwalls that would more-or-less wall off the Hackensack River from the communities in the Project Area. Alternative 2, the "Stormwater Drainage Improvement Alternative," would implement a series of local projects aimed at improving stormwater drainage and reducing flood risk. Alternative 3, the "Hybrid Alternative," would blend structural flood reduction infrastructure with stormwater drainage improvements.

Hackensack Riverkeeper has been actively involved in the project proposal from its inception, including as a member of the Citizen Advisory Group (CAG). Based on our familiarity with the various versions of the project proposal and our expertise with stormwater management, ***Hackensack Riverkeeper supports Alternative 2, the "Stormwater Drainage Improvement Alternative."*** Alternative 2 would better enhance quality of life for the residents of the communities while protecting against frequent flooding events and stormwater pollution. Under Alternative 2, a range of projects could be implemented that utilize green infrastructure, create open space, widen ditches, generate new public access opportunities, and encourage wetlands creation or enhancement.

Furthermore, regardless of which alternative is eventually chosen, it is essential that all of the potential alternatives utilize a holistic planning approach that considers District-wide impacts and focuses on long-term solutions to flooding and sea level rise. It is not enough to provide protection to impacted communities for only the next 30 years; the project should aim to provide protection for the next century or more.

How You Can Get Involved

Anyone can get involved by joining the Citizen Advisory Group – just send an email to rbd-meadowlands@dep.nj.gov or show up at a meeting! The next meeting will be on Tuesday, January 31, 2017 from 6:00pm-8:00pm at the Learning Center Room, 4th Floor, One Bergen County Plaza, Hackensack, NJ.

If public meetings aren't your cup of tea, stay up-to-date by subscribing to NJDEP's e-mailing list at <http://www.nj.gov/dep/floodresilience/rbd-meadowlands-subscribe.htm> and make sure to keep an eye out for the forthcoming Draft Environmental Impact Statement.