



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**

Baltimore District

Public Affairs Office

P.O. Box 1715

Baltimore, MD 21203

(410) 962-2809

Fax: (410) 962-3660

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Contact: Doug Garman or Mary Dan

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Phone: 410-962-2809 or 410-962-3377

Corps of Engineers announces Bloomsburg flood protection project study results

Baltimore - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, announced today that based on information gathered to date, a local flood protection project for the Bloomsburg community does qualify for federal cost sharing. A recent assessment of the proposed project using preliminary cost estimates indicates that the national economic benefit of the project exceeds the cost of its construction.

"This is good news for the town," says Mayor Coffman. "I feel strongly that flood protection will not only sustain current businesses but will spark new economic opportunities."

"Bloomsburg is the only large community on the Susquehanna River between Wilkes-Barre and Sunbury lacking flood protection. Since 1901, the town has experienced damage from thirty floods," said Bloomsburg Councilman George Turner.

As a part of this assessment, two different project alignments were evaluated. The interior alignment that essentially bisects the main fairground and the fairground parking area, and the locally-preferred fringe alignment that includes a sizeable portion of the fairground parking area within the protected area were both evaluated. Each would include a combination of earthen levee, mechanically-stabilized earth walls and concrete floodwalls. Each alignment would also be built to protect against flood levels equal to that of the storm of record, the 1972 Tropical Storm Agnes

"The next step in this project is for the Corps to develop the design of each alignment in greater detail to further refine costs and determine which alignment maximizes net national benefits. This alignment will then be defined as the national economic development (NED) plan," said Mary Dan, Baltimore District project manager. "We will also have to make sure that we mitigate for any adverse impacts to surrounding communities such as Fernville."

Design and construction costs for the NED plan are cost-shared 65 percent federal and 35 percent non-Federal. Until each of the alignments can be further developed, no decision has been made on which alignment will be recommended as the NED plan. Preliminary cost estimates for both alignments are too close to determine which is the NED plan. The non-federal sponsor is required to pay 100 percent of any cost increase between what is identified as the NED plan and a locally-preferred plan.

In June 1999, the Corps and the Town of Bloomsburg initiated a feasibility study to determine if building a flood protection project was economically justified. This study is being cost-shared 50 percent federal and 50 percent non-federal. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is contributing half of the non-federal share for the study and has also committed to contributing half of the non-federal share for design and construction.

"DEP is pleased with the level of cooperation and partnership that has developed between our agency, the town and the Corps. We are all working together to bring flood protection to the citizens, businesses, and industries in Bloomsburg," said DEP's Mike Conway. The study is scheduled for completion next summer.

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