

New Haven Missouri River levee issue

Update, March 2014

Background

The levee was constructed in 1954-55 by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) through an agreement with the City of New Haven. The City maintains the levee under the direction of USACE. The controlling authority is Public Law 84-99.

USACE performs annual maintenance inspections of the City levee. The levee has an excellent maintenance record and has generally been given the highest Corps' rating, "Acceptable." However, the levee is currently rated "Minimally Acceptable" and the City has been asked to correct several deficiencies in order to maintain this rating. (More information on this point below.)

New Haven's levee held against the floods of 1993 and '95, the two worst floods on record on the lower Missouri River. New Haven's levee has never been breached.

Flood insurance

The primary issue facing the City in 2014 is meeting federal requirements related to the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) as administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA revised the Flood Insurance Rate Maps for New Haven in 2011, and the downtown area behind the levee is currently in "Zone X," which is a favorable rating.

However FEMA in early 2014 initiated a re-mapping process which could lead to a change in downtown's flood-risk designation. FEMA detailed its process at a meeting at New Haven City Hall in late January, 2014. The City now understands it has three general options.

- Option A, full accreditation: The levee height would need to be raised approximately three feet for the levee to be fully accredited with FEMA. If the levee were fully accredited, the current Zone X flood-risk designation would not change. The cost of raising the levee elevation by three feet has been estimated at \$500,000 to \$1 million dollars.
- Option B, partial accreditation ("freeboard deficient"): The levee height would not be raised under this option; however the levee would still need to pass a full engineering evaluation in order to qualify for what FEMA terms its "freeboard deficient" accreditation. The result of this would likely be a "Zone D" flood-risk designation, which would mean increased flood insurance premiums but would not require mandated restrictions on new construction and development. Preliminary cost estimates for the required engineering package for this option range from \$65,000 to \$200,000.
- Option C, de-accreditation: This option essentially is a "do nothing" option. If the City cannot meet the FEMA requirements, then FEMA has indicated it would initiate a re-mapping process which would result in a "Special Flood Hazard Area" designation for the downtown protected area. This SFHA designation would trigger mandatory flood insurance purchase requirements and would require the City to enforce severe restrictions on new construction and development in the newly designated "floodplain."

What is happening now

The City in February, 2014 issued a Request for Proposals from engineering firms to assist the City in meeting the “freeboard deficient” accreditation requirements. The City received five proposals, which were presented to the Board of Aldermen at its March 10 meeting. The Board at the meeting directed the City Administrator to study the proposals further and bring a recommendation to the Board at the April 14 meeting. (The engineering proposals and other information related to this issue are available online at www.newhavenmo.org/FloodplainManagementLeveeAccreditation.html).

The likely recommendation will be to engage a consulting engineering firm for what is being termed a “Phase 1” proposal. The Phase 1 services would include an evaluation of the accreditation issue, identification of any obstacles or impediments to accreditation, and a cost estimate to meet the FEMA requirements. The Phase 1 services would also include an evaluation of options to raise the levee elevation by three feet and thereby gain full accreditation.

The Board of Aldermen may be presented with a recommended Phase 1 proposal at the April 14 meeting. The Board may also be requested to interview a recommended firm or firms before making a final decision.

Corps of Engineers report

The City is also currently dealing with the recommendations in a recent report by the Corps of Engineers. This report was received in February, 2014 and requires the City to address several “deficiencies” with the levee in order to maintain an “Acceptable” or “Minimally Acceptable” rating. The deficiencies include the removal of several trees on the levee berm, some of which appear to be high-value trees located in City park areas and on private property. These and many other “deficiencies” were not identified in previous USACE levee inspections and the City is currently considering its options to meet these requirements. This topic is also expected to be an agenda item for the April 14 Board of Aldermen meeting.



More information

The City maintains a page of information on this issue on the City website, www.newhavenmo.org/FloodplainManagementLeveeAccreditation.html. The City appreciates citizen involvement in these issues and would encourage people to contact FEMA, USACE and elected federal representatives with any questions or concerns you may have. Contact information is available on the City website and at City Hall.