

DOWNTOWN PROPERTY OWNERS AND RESIDENTS TO ADDRESS FLOODING



DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

By Barry Cassidy

As a property owner in Downtown for the last twenty years or so, I have experienced three floods that have affected the community. They all caused a lot of damage, and it took a long time to recover. The flooding during Hurricane IDA was particularly devastating.

The thing about Downingtown is that, in many cases, if it is not raining, there is no problem, and it is time to move on. I tried to work through the process to address flooding issues and found the process onerous locally.

Sometimes it is hard to move from one agenda item to the next . . . "Okay, we voted; next on the agenda is . . ." Then, halfway through the next agenda item, you will end up talking again about the previous agenda item. I tried being a member of committees, but it just never seemed like there was a will to proceed.

FEMA asked if I would like to Chair the County's Long-term recovery, and I did for about four months. Then, the County contacted the Chester County Foundation and said they did not want to work with the committee. A motion to disband was offered, and the group was disbanded. I voted for it because I would not want to be part of an organization that would not have me as a member.

So many committees later, I decided to form my own C-3 called the Downingtown Resilience Fund. Everything went

well for two meetings, and then I saw the dysfunction again in the committee I chaired. I was hurt at first and thought I can't believe this is happening.

I came home and talked with my wife about the incidents, and she told me to move on. Typically, I heed her advice, but a voice in my head said, "Nah . . . not this time." I had to become the work Barry and not the volunteer Barry.

The Resilience Fund had some board resignations and some hard feelings from those leaving the board. Of course, I was bad-mouthed locally, but because I was the work Barry, I was used to the undercurrent of decent and personal attacks.

The Downingtown Resilience Fund will hold its first public stakeholder meeting on April 18th to offer a plan to become a resilient community. In a change of approach, our efforts will not be centered on government action on the local level but exclusively represent the interests of the people.

It is a meeting to develop a property owner and resident flood response. The 501 C-3 non-profit was created to recruit volunteer case workers to be trained to help organize for future disasters in Caln, Downingtown, and East Caln.

The Resilience Fund will actively seek funding to help mitigate residential and commercial flooding by providing grants for private property improvements that could potentially limit future damage to homes and work to create flood map revisions to eliminate the need for mandatory flood insurance.

(Continued on page 48)

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(Continued from page 47)

The Resilience Fund will act as a depository for relief funding during an emergency and award cash grants to owners of commercial and residential properties. The second part of the program will be to create a mitigation effort to address map revisions.

Grant programs will soon be available, and it is imperative that residents, business owners, and property owners organize to secure their share of the dollars available as direct grants for mitigation.

On the relief side, volunteer case managers will be the primary point of contact for survivors, assisting individuals in coordinating necessary services and disaster funding.

1. Develop a survivor list from intake forms.
2. Secure Privacy Release to act as Case Manager.
3. Determine eligibility for cash grants and other Fund services.
4. Utilize the FEMA – GO Downingtown Resilience portal as a point of application for survivors.
5. Determine the recovery path from the National Referral list of resources.
6. Provide and explain information to survivors to enable them to access the resources.
7. Avoid duplication of benefits or services.

8. Advocate with and for clients by activities including but not limited to:
 - a. Provide continuity of approach.
 - b. Preparing applications.
 - c. Develop a path for rehabilitation of the property.
 - d. Problem-solving through completion of the claim.

I am going to “play through” and attempt to make a difference. We have secured a corporate partner in the Exton-based BELFOR. BELFOR has cleanup and restoration teams across the country that respond to flooding and water damage caused by severe storms with excessive rainfall and heavy snowfall. We picked up a big-league player that wants to help us.

BELFOR offered to host our meeting on April 18th at 7:00 PM at their headquarters, 410 Clover Mill Road, in Exton. We are direct mailing the 19335 zip code with a notice of the meeting. This is an action committee that will serve the interests of the people. This will not be easy as there is entrenched apathy among official bodies.

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