

FRTF-Meeting Minutes (1973) March 28

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FLOOD RECOVERY TASK FORCE, INC.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ 165 S. Franklin Street
WILKES-BARRE, PENNSYLVANIA 18701
717 - 829-1981

MINUTES

MEETING of the Executive Committee, March 28th, Hotel Sterling, noon.

Present: Bierly, Boltz, Hardwick, Hourigan, Kiley, Lashford, Morgan, Rose, Rosenn, Rubinstein, Sordoni, B. Schechter, Shaw.

Shaw reported on the progress that Direction Associates has made on the Housing work-program it is developing for the Task Force. He also discussed the results of the Public Opinion Survey conducted for the Task Force by Wilbur Smith and Associates, and reported the progress this same consulting firm has made on the Area Appearance and Image work-program it is formulating for the Task Force.

In regard to the Housing project Shaw reported that results were discouraging at first. The first report Direction Associates submitted, on financing sources for housing developers who are planning construction in Wyoming Valley, required extensive reworking by the Consultant and by Task Force staff. The second, on population characteristics, was unsatisfactory in content, format, and style, and, consequently, was withdrawn by the Consultant and recently resubmitted. A draft of a third report, on governmental regulation of housing construction in Wyoming Valley, was received at the same time as was the redraft of the second report. Though the staff has not yet made a careful critique of the new drafts, they can see that the re-written one is greatly improved and likely to be of real value to housing developers.

On the Public Opinion Survey conducted by Wilbur Smith and Associates, Shaw remarked that though it did not reveal a suspected demand for consolidation of local governments, it did show widespread eagerness to see local governments combine to provide better services. He also noted that the survey produced a great deal of information that is bound to prove useful to local officials and other community leaders in a number of ways.

Turning to the Area Appearance and Image project, Shaw expressed the opinion that, when finished, this piece of work will prove to be the Task Force's most important contribution to the Valley's economic recovery. He noted that charts and maps already submitted in connection with this project point to numerous feasible ways to speedily improve the Valley's appearance and change its image for the better both in the eyes of its own residents and in those of persons living outside the region. Finally, Shaw noted that one of the Consultant's contract obligations is to set up a prototype improvement program

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M I N U T E S

MEETING of FRTF Committee on Flood Control
December 28, 1973
Hq., Chamber of Commerce, 12:15 P.M.

Present: Harden Coon, Richard Cronin, John Doran, Robert Laux, Robert Maskin, Roy Morgan, Robert Parker, Richard Pearsall, Kim Ross, Betty Schechter, Andrew Shaw, Jr., Robert Slaff, Nick Souchik, Frank Townend, Walter Wint.

Morgan announced that the meeting had been called to (1) assess the year's end status of matters relating to flood control in Wyoming Valley, and (2) hear reports on the December 13th meeting of the Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) in Harrisburg.

(1) Townend said that in several respects the Valley's levee system is in much better shape than it was when last he reported on it. First, rain pounding on the dikes since post-Agnes repairs were made to them has compacted them substantially; second, repairs to the dikes in the Riverside Drive area appear to have been completed satisfactorily, and, though repairs in the Forty Fort area are not yet complete, it looks as though they will also be satisfactory when finished; third, the Army Corps of Engineers (COE) has formally recommended raising Valley dikes five additional feet.

(2) Reporting on the SRBC's December 13th meeting, Souchik said the Commission announced it would hold a public hearing on February 15th on the COE proposal to raise Wyoming Valley dikes. He also said that he thinks the SRBC favors the COE proposal and has scheduled the hearing chiefly because it is required to do so by law.

Slaff said that it's important to remember two things about the SRBC: first, it has a great deal of power over what happens in the River Basin area; second, it is bound by its charter to represent a wide variety of Basin interests. Expanding on the second point, Slaff said that it is widely believed in Sunbury that it was only because Wyoming Valley served as an impounding basin at the time of Tropical Storm Agnes that Sunbury was not flooded. Thus, he said, areas downriver from Wilkes-Barre may well oppose additional mechanical flood control measures in Wyoming Valley for fear that added protection of this kind for the Valley will mean added danger of flooding for areas down river.

Townend moved that the FRTF Committee on Flood Control assume SRBC support for the COE proposal and send a letter to the SRBC urging them to expedite implementation of the proposal. Shaw seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

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Next, there was discussion of an announcement at the December 13th SRB Commission meeting to the effect that completion of a flood plain mapping project the Commission had contracted for was 90 days overdue. Souchik said this unwarranted delay in completion of a vital SRBC project was only one of many such delays, and that all could be laid to a lack of forcefulness on the part of the SRBC staff. Discussion of the point Souchik had raised led to agreement that the FRTF Committee on Flood Control should put its dissatisfaction with the progress of the flood plain mapping project on record. Reid moved that the Committee (1) send the SRBC a letter urging that it set a definite date for completion of the project and put pressure on the contractor doing the work to meet that deadline; (2) send a copy of this letter to Robert Bielo, Executive Director of the SRBC; (3) urge appropriate governmental agencies to write to Bielo expressing their concern about the unfortunate effects the delays in completing the flood plain mapping project is having. Pearsall seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

Souchik expressed concern about the quality of flood forecasting in the Susquehanna River Basin. He said that on several occasions the forecasting system presently in operation proved unreliable, and he recommended strongly that an appeal be made to Governor Shapp to revive the citizen band radio system of flood forecasting that was in use at the time of Agnes.

Townend said that Wyoming Valley cannot afford to wait for Basin-wide improvement in the flood forecasting system. He urged that informal cooperative arrangements to relay information about the river be made with Towanda and two other localities at once.

for one of the Valley's flood-affected municipalities, and that Plymouth is likely to be the community chosen for this purpose.

Discussion of when Task Force operations should be terminated, and on what basis, ensued. It was agreed that, in accordance with the Task Force's understanding with the Economic Development Administration at the time of its funding, the organization should wind up its work by early summer and transfer all unfinished projects to appropriate ongoing community organizations. It was also agreed that it would be best to keep the Task Force alive as a corporation in case a need for it to act as such should arise. It was moved and seconded that the Task Force terminate its operations on June 23rd, the second anniversary of the Tropical Storm Agnes flood, but continue to exist as a corporation. The motion passed.

Next, the question of who should be responsible for maintenance of Wyoming Valley levees came under discussion. It was agreed that the present situation in which the County maintains some levees, and individual municipalities maintain others, is unsatisfactory. Hourigan suggested approaching the County Engineer with the idea that the County should have the ultimate responsibility for maintenance of all County levees. Rosenn suggested that the Task Force pass a resolution calling for the County to be responsible for making sure that the separate municipalities maintain their own levees. Further discussion of the issue produced agreement that the County Commissioners should be approached on the matter before a resolution is passed. It was moved and seconded that the Task Force recommend to the County Commissioners that the County assume the responsibility for maintenance of the levees. The motion passed.

Next, disposition of unspent Task Force funds was discussed. Rosenn pointed to a need for a group dedicated to making sure that municipalities carry out their economic responsibilities. He said that since there have been instances of such citizens groups meeting with success, the EDA might approve use of remaining Task Force funds to start a responsible citizens action group in the Wyoming Valley. Shaw expressed the opinion that EDA might look favorably on use of some Task Force funds to make the Susquehanna River Basin a vital, useful organization. The Committee asked the staff to outline possible uses of these monies for the Committee's consideration at its next meeting.

It was agreed that every effort should be made to get full attendance at the next meeting of the Committee, and that arrangements should be made for a photograph of the Committee to be taken at that time.

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