

Mayor clarifies stance on reservoir

To the editor:

Regarding "Reservoir Debate in Westwood" (Record - Your Views, Sept. 28) I would like to provide a brief clarification. The efforts being undertaken by the Borough of Westwood to provide a level of relief to our residents affected by chronic flooding

should not be characterized as a battle against United Water. We consider United Water an important partner for both the safe and reliable distribution of water to our residents and also for the protection of a most precious natural resource along with lands buffering our drinking water supply.

Our position regarding the operation of the Woodcliff Lake Reservoir and the bascule gates on its dam at a base elevation of 91 feet is one that respects both an adequate year around water supply and a certain degree of protection aimed at mitigating the effects of flooding caused by severe precipitation events. Unfortunately United Water points to the [New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection], and the NJDEP has been unwilling to cooperate with our requests.

The Woodcliff Lake Dam is scheduled to return to normal operation after nearly two years of reconstruction. Immediately upon its completion our residents will be once again placed directly in harm's way without the modest buffer we are seeking, one recommend by an engineering study

completed in 2011.

For several decades there have been a variety of task forces set up with seemingly every new election cycle. Case in point is the "Bi-State Flood Commission" whose first appointment was made in 2012. That group is still not yet staffed, nor have they even held a meeting.

Meanwhile, by purchasing homes in flood prone neighborhoods, replacing leaking sewer lines, and requiring adequate retention basins and rain gardens in developments, Westwood has been a proactive leader in our approach at both flood mitigation and the protection of Bergen County's drinking water supply.

We are well versed in the conditions that cause flooding in our area and in measures we can take to lessen its impact. Through our resolution 15-206 we are asking our neighboring municipalities, the County of Bergen, and our state legislators to stand up for our residents who continue to be at risk due to inaction and persistent bureaucratic intransigence.

Mayor John Birkner, Jr.
Westwood