

As we put the final edits to this piece, Borough officials are busy with the aftermath of Hurricane Irene and the terrible damage left in her wake. Although we had hoped for the best as the storm approached, we prepared for the worst. Unfortunately Irene had her own path and brought with her over eight inches of rain to our area causing widespread flooding and serious damage throughout several borough neighborhoods. We are now in the process of communicating with our Federal, State, and County officials in obtaining assistance for our residents. As this article is published several weeks after it is submitted, we recommend that you check with the Borough of Westwood website, www.westwoodnj.gov, for the most recent updates and information regarding disaster relief efforts. We will be doing everything in our power to help our residents along the way.

For over a year the Pascack Valley Waterway Management Task Force (PVWMFT) has worked towards finding ways to prevent and mitigate the effects of flooding. This working group of mayors, council members and borough representatives has met a number of times, even in the stream to discuss possible solutions. These sessions frequently include our state representatives or their designee, engineering professionals, as well as representatives from United Water.

On August 11th, the PVWMTF conducted a work shop meeting. The Westwood members of the task force, Councilwoman Waneck and Mayor Birkner attended along with Borough Administrator Bob Hoffmann and OEM Coordinator Darren Blankenbush. The participants were able to review some of the historical information compiled with regard to flooding issues in Westwood and throughout the Pascack Valley, as well as listen to a presentation made by officials from United Water that included plans for work on the dam in 2012 as well as outreach to the community. During this meeting we were able to obtain a commitment from many of the experts in attendance, including Federal and State representatives from the Army Corps. of Engineers, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Bureau of Dam Safety, Bureau of Water Supply, and Bureau of Stream Permitting, and the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management, to attend and participate in a presentation to a larger audience in September. The office of the County Executive has also committed representation by the County Departments that have been involved in the efforts, and we also have our individual engineering experts that will be participating. United Water has also committed to attend and answer questions from our residents, review the recent storm events, past flooding history in the region, and also to provide an update and overview of their project to improve the structural integrity of the Woodcliff Lake Dam.

There are no easy answers, many state legislators have dedicated years to the topic; however, the PVWMTF has created a forum that is actively exploring ways to make improvements physically and operationally to help alleviate some of the flooding problems that have plagued our region for decades.

Reminders to residents and landscapers will go out this fall that they are not permitted to dump vegetative waste, leaves, into the streams. By working with our engineers and environmental groups we also hope to have information on how residents can help stabilize their property by incorporating natural stream stabilization techniques. We will continue to provide the most updated information possible.