

Natural Resources Committee Hearing
October 9, 2012

My name is Mark Stursma (spell for the record). I am the Planning Director and designated Floodplain Manager for the City of Papillion, as well as an appointed member of the Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership.

The City of Papillion fully supports the plan, adopted by the Partnership, to address stormwater quality mandates and flood protection within the Papillion Creek Watershed (PCWP). That plan proposes the creation of multiple reservoirs, along with other initiatives, to achieve its goals. Implementation of this plan is vitally important to the City of Papillion because:

1. Papillion is a downstream community. That means that pollution and increased runoff from existing and future development in Douglas County and even Washington County flows down to us. Unfortunately, much of Omaha was developed well before stormwater management was a reality. As a result, the risk of flooding has increased. The City of Papillion and other downstream communities are at risk now; and need flood protection now rather than later. Only regional detention can collect significant enough amounts of runoff from existing development to provide protection in a timely manner.
2. In 2010, FEMA's revised floodplain maps became affective. (Papillion began enforcing them in 2007.) The revised maps significantly increased the amount of land designated as floodplain and floodway along the West Papillion Creek. The City of Papillion notified 249 property owners of a change in floodplain status. (See Exhibits) The affects ranged from households and business needing to buy flood insurance, when they did not previously, to developers who had invested millions in property and infrastructure being told that they would no longer be issued building permits because their property was designated as floodway. These revised maps had an enormous impact on our city. For the record, Papillion does not allow development in a floodplain. Habitable structures must be elevated to at least 1 ft. above the adopted floodplain elevation or flood-proofed. We could not have predicted that the floodplain maps that we relied on would be changed so dramatically.
3. A mitigation plan has been prepared that illustrates how to recertify the levees along the West Papio Creek and reduce the newly defined area of floodway, thus reducing the risk of flooding for those properties now declared to be within a flood hazard area. The mitigation plan includes bridge elevations, levee improvements, and regional detention reservoirs. These are all methods that FEMA recognizes for amending flood hazard designations. At this time, other methods such as Low Impact Development (LID) are not recognized by FEMA. LID is not recognized by FEMA because it is difficult to calculate it's level of protection, especially over time as, since maintenance of such systems is handled privately.

The PCWP adopted a plan to manage stormwater in a way that best serves all the jurisdictions within the watershed. Regional detention was chosen because it is the best solution for our particular needs.

1. Only regional detention can collect runoff from existing development. This is important to us because downstream communities are already at risk.

2. We trust that regional detention reservoirs will remain effective over time because they will be publicly maintained.
3. Timing is important. A regional detention reservoir can provide immediate protection, both quality and quantity, for a large drainage area once constructed. Other methods happen incrementally over time and are dependent upon new development or redevelopment.
4. Although not the objective of the NRD or the Partnership, a side benefit of regional reservoirs is that they create public recreation amenities that increase the value of surrounding development, which helps to offset the loss of property tax revenue of the reservoir.

Years of development in the upstream portions of the watershed have resulted in the ever increasing risk of flooding downstream. The Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership was created because it was understood that everyone within the watershed shared in the responsibility of managing stormwater. Yet, there has been ongoing activity by individuals and organizations representing upstream portions of the watershed to limit or delay flood prevention projects – illustrating a disregard for the wellbeing of those affected by their actions. This is unfortunate, because it is clear that we need to work together to protect our residents from the potential catastrophic effects of flooding.