



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Options are Weighed on how to Reduce the Risk of Flooding in the District** *Viable Options Presented in Wrap-Up Session*

**Washington, DC** – Representatives of three federal agencies and the District of Columbia today concluded a two-day exploration of the periodic flooding that puts critical government buildings and services at risk in the monumental core. The goal is to avoid a repeat of the massive flooding of downtown federal buildings that occurred in June of 2006.

The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), the General Services Administration (GSA), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the District of Columbia hosted the event, which was held at the Ronald Reagan Building.

More than 100 people from throughout the federal and District governments attended sessions over the past two days. The talks focused on emergency response, stormwater management, and system-wide infrastructure improvements.

This morning, facilitators from each of the sessions reported their group's recommendations for what needs to occur before, during, and after a flood event. Communication and information sharing was the most urgent need reported by all groups.

“There is a clear need to improve communication among federal and local agencies, as well as with members of the public—not only during a crisis, but also before and after,” said John V. Cogbill, III, chairman of NCPC.

The second most common issue identified at the forum is the need for coordination among affected parties. “There are many plans but there is no obvious point of coordination,” said Don Edwards, CEO of Justice and Sustainability Associates. “Once identified, periodic exercises should take place to refine coordination and make sure it works.”

Ideas raised by participants ranged from establishing a clearinghouse to which all federal agencies could report their needs, to identifying which agencies have portable generators that could be moved to agencies that lose electricity during a flood event. Another suggestion was to designate one agency to serve as the lead point of contact, while other agency representatives proposed putting an interim pumping station into place that could better protect federal buildings during a flood.

All of the working groups gave close scrutiny to costs associated with the potential solutions. “We need to define the most effective and affordable way to address the District’s ancient sewer system and identify a funding source,” said Roger Gans with the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority. Gans recommended that NCPC take the lead in developing a best practices manual.

More than eleven inches of rain fell during the last week of June 2006, setting a new record for a five day period in the District. Federal buildings closed for days, and damage to the National Archives was so great that the building closed to the public for three weeks. Major roadways and tunnels became impassable, and electricity was turned off to the entire Federal Triangle area.

“There is no way to completely guarantee that a recurrence won’t occur,” said Cogbill. “Flooding can and does happen, but the next time, we want to be better prepared.”

Michelle Desiderio, a senior community planner at NCPC, thoroughly researched the issue and prepared an extensive paper on the flooding issue in February. She informed forum participants that Washington’s geography, topography, and hydrology all play a role in the risk of flooding.

“Due to buried waterways, broad floodplains, and relatively flat elevations—much of the monumental core is highly vulnerable to periodic flooding,” said Desiderio. “Also, because downtown DC is served by a combined sewer—meaning that a single pipe carries both stormwater and sewage—stormwater capacity is limited. In a heavy rainstorm, there is simply no where for the water to go.”

“We need creative ways for the water to drain back to the soil, but we must also be sensitive to the cumulative effect of our actions,” said Cogbill. “Pumping water out of one building only to dump it in the basement of the next building is not an acceptable solution. We must have a universal approach that works for all agencies that are susceptible to damage from flooding.”

Interagency teams will study the recommendations, hold periodic meetings to share information, and implement lessons learned at their agencies. Reports will be made to the NCPC, which will serve as the repository of all information collected.

“I think success in this endeavor will require the utmost level of cooperation between all responsible parties,” said Cogbill. “This is the first time the key agencies have come together to resolve this issue and I think it is a great first step.”

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