

Buchanan County Flood Resiliency Listening Session 4/27/2023

11 people in attendance

Introductions

- How have you been impacted by the flooding?
 - Rocks have come into people's yards, making it difficult to mow
 - Creeks and storm drains are filled with debris, increasing flooding occurrences
 - Land is still eroding into the waterways
 - Houses/debris haven't been cleaned up
 - Angela Johnson: lost everything but family Bible in the flood. Father was a coal miner. Doesn't have resources to put another mobile home on property
 - Nancy Mullins: sheetrock cut out of 4 rooms downstairs and no replacement of carpet.
 - Burns Mullins - suggest that the way the river has been redirected has caused a lot of the flooding.
 - Sharon White - lost retaining wall/ drain pipes under bridge makes flooding bad.

Why do you love living in Buchanan County?

- "It's home"
- Quiet, safe, and good neighborhoods
- Family has been in the area for 8 generations, homesteading
- Close bunch of people that help each other in time of need. Neighbors helping neighbors without thinking of what they would get out of it.

What have your experiences been in the aftermath of the flood with aid and recovery?

- Michael and Rita Wolford
 - In Hurley, they took our land. Can't live in the area because it's a flood plain. Believe it's the county that took the land. The county is 90% woods/ mountains. There is not land or places to buy. All of the land is by the creek.
 - There won't be anyone left in the county because their houses are gone and they have to leave. No choice to come back. - County Administrator said not to build land up because it will throw water on someone else's land - Still getting taxed on the land but not able to rebuild. Garden or Recreation only. Have never gotten to same answer from Army Corp - There were homes scheduled to be raised by Army Corp but the houses were damaged and washed away. State funding from Hurley Flood only came this past year.
- Why doesn't the county have a place for people to stay who have lost their homes in the flood?
- Angela Johnson
 - Received a letter from Army Corp of Engineers stating that they are in the flood zone. Is not sure if they are even allowed to build back on the property. Not able to get flood insurance. Nationwide insurance cancelled their policy because they were in the flood zone.
 - Unsure of whether they are allowed back on the property
- Burns and Nancy Mullins

- Environmentalist stated that no one can get into the creek. Sounds like they like the crawdads and mussels better than people. They said it's a trout stream behind our house. Unable to push rocks on the bank to keep the from losing the land
 - VDOT has been inactive
- Robert Kell, Appalachian Voices
 - Buchanan received \$400k from the Virginia Flood Preparedness Act to develop flood prevention plans
 - Angela asks if bridge repairs are available with that funding?
 - Most likely not
- Rita
 - Trey Adkins doesn't talk to the people in Hurley - getting the run-around when asking questions. How do we know where to go to when there is nobody here to give us answers? This is the 5th listening session from different organizations, no one ever replies.
- Immediate Needs - Bridge Repair and Clearing water ways; channeling the river; hired position to oversee debris clean-up
- Long terms needs - A safe place for displaced people; prevent VA being removed from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which provides flood prevention funding
 - **RGGI funds have been given to 44 families in the amount of \$4.4 million. However, this is only for the 2021 Hurley flood.**
 - Those impacted by the most recent floods do not have access to this funding, but there is an opportunity for the most recent victims to receive funds if it is passed at the general assembly.
 - Delegate Moorefield is a point of contact for this budget allocation.
 - People need to tell legislators about the issue. Get everyone involved so that legislators involved in the issue.
 - Some people have not gotten any funds so far.
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 - **County Involvement**
- We have reached out to Buchanan for assistance with the listening sessions and promotion.
 - Greg Horn did not respond.
 - No supervisors have responded in the area.
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 - **More Short Term/Long Term Development Needs**
- Clean the creeks
- Cemeteries are handled in regards to flood areas when their bridges are damaged.
 - Personal property bridges continue to not be given support or repairs
 - Parks and playgrounds are also not given flood repair assistance
- Clear waterways
- Have neighbors clean around their house and homes
- Have the county recommend flood preventative measures
 - Keep private property and yards clean

- Upkeep measures
- Incentivize private landowners
- Let community members know of the resources available and know they have consistent assistance.
 - Without additional help and ongoing support, some people will continue to fall into destitution.
- Have someone available who can accommodate for the application process of flood aid and home aid.
- Home demolishing process for damaged homes that pose a black mold risk.
- Apply for grants/Recruit those that can secure community funding
- No cellphone service for emergency services in the area!
 - Cell tower expansion needs to be brought to this area.
 - 911 can not be contacted
 - County Clerk Jack Kennedy in Wise County would be a good point of contact for this issue before he leaves office.

What can we do differently to make sure people are aware of UNITY?

- Door knocking
- Facebook Pages
- Post in post office for future meetings
 - Meeting place is a gymnasium in Hurley
 - School board oversees that
- Word of Mouth is Huge
- Continue doing mailings
- SAMS can provide additional flood aid

Why do people not show out for meetings/town listening sessions?

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- Folks are busy
- People in the county fear their job security if they speak out against the county or speak for better flood plan conditions.
- Word of mouth is the best way to congregate community members
- People are helping people, the county does not help people.

Virginia Energy Office

- Got funding from the federal level to build a safe space where people can stay during disasters that always has power
 - We need people to show interest and gauge community interest, the best area for a building of this magnitude to be placed, etc.
 - It's imperative that people are able to access this building.
 - AMLR Grant
 - Can fund community spaces