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Rhode Island

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CONTACT: Matt Sheley at (401) 712-2221 or [msheley@middletownri.com](mailto:msheley@middletownri.com)

### **MAIDFORD RIVER MAINTENANCE**

MIDDLETOWN, R.I. (JANUARY 16, 2021) – During rainstorms, the Maidford River can be a problem.

That’s when the north-south flowing stream on the east side of town can become a monster and run over its banks, particularly along Berkeley Avenue.

Not only does this flooding make it difficult for cars and pedestrians to pass, but the water can undermine the existing roadbed and limits access of emergency vehicles, among other concerns.

Aware of these concerns about the meandering waterway, the Maidford River Restoration Project Team is trying to come up with a fix that works for everyone without costing too much money.

“It doesn’t take a whole lot of rain for the Maidford River to flow outside of its channel,” Southern New England Network Partners consultant Elizabeth Scott said. “It floods local roads and lawns and fields and obviously, it creates lots of problems in doing so...The river is very flashy in wet weather, meaning it can go from very low flow to really a torrent of water flowing downstream and it happens very quickly.”

Recently, the restoration group briefed the Town Council about its work to date and concepts for addressing the ongoing concerns.

The driving force behind the restoration project actually doesn’t seem to have much to do with road bases, flooding or emergency vehicle access on the surface. It’s actually something most people here don’t have to think about on a daily basis like other parts of the country – water quality.

Scott said despite what some might think, the flooding does tie directly to water quality issues and if Middletown doesn’t do something, it might make what seems like a backwater problem a costly front-burner issue soon.

Importantly, she said the Maidford that starts in the area of Newport Vineyards flows south and helps feed Nelson and Gardiner ponds, both which serve the Newport reservoir system, the main source of public drinking water.

Scott said poor water quality in the Maidford can also adversely impact wildlife like the saltmarsh sparrow in Sachuest Marsh as well as shellfishing at Third Beach, where it empties north of the Third Beach boat ramp.

As part of the multistep plan being discussed now, Scott said eliminating flooding will go to great lengths to improve water quality.

Among the work discussed included digging out a portion of the Maidford, replace a culvert in the area, raise part of Berkeley Avenue by two feet and create temporary floodplain storage.

“It’s like a small river, an almost a nonexistent river at some times of the year, but it really has an outside impact on sensitive natural resources,” Scott said. “In particular, the greatest concern of all of that, is contribution to degraded water quality in Nelson Pond and Gardiner reservoir, two of Newport’s drinking water supply reservoirs.”

In response, council members said everyone on the seven-member board places a priority on clean drinking water. At the same time, some wondered if expanding the scope of the restoration group’s work might yield better – and potentially less costly – results.

Early in the presentation, Scott said her group’s work was confined to the Maidford River where it cuts under Berkeley Avenue to the intersection with Green End Avenue. Councilman Thomas Welch questioned whether it might make sense to address the flooding closer to the source of the Maidford, near where the Newport National Golf Club is looking for water for irrigation.

Others said they’d have a difficult time committing to the project now without knowing the full scope of the work and its price tag. Scott and Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown said those numbers weren’t available yet because the project isn’t done yet.

However, both noted that Middletown would not be bearing all the cost and grant money and other funding sources would go a long way to help offset the anticipated costs.

“There are some innovative finance tools that are available that don’t necessarily hit the taxpayers’ bottom line,” Brown said. “There’s a number of financing vehicles, instruments that are used in other parts of the country and we have an opportunity to really be one of the first to communities in Rhode Island to access those, things where people are looking to make investment because they need environmental credits for other operations they have in other communities. This is a real opportunity to bring in those outside dollars that have a direct benefit to the town of Middletown.”

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