

Montgomery County doles out \$3.8M to repair Needwood Dam

■ Heavy rains in June caused water to leak

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The Montgomery County Council on Tuesday morning unanimously approved \$3.8 million to fund repairs on the Lake Needwood Dam in Der-

wood.

The Planning Board met with the council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee last week to discuss funding for the project.

The repairs are needed as a result of storm damage from heavy rains that pounded the area during the last week of June.

The rains resulted in a rapid rise of

the water level in Lake Needwood. The reservoir peaked nearly 25 feet above its normal level, and on June 27 uncontrolled leaking occurred on the left downstream slope and abutment of the dam.

Since such seepage can compromise an earthen dam, the county evacuated about 2,200 residents downstream, mostly in Aspen Hill, in the early-morning hours. The leaks stopped and the lake itself receded three days later.

The county reported no problems with the dam during Tropical Storm Ernesto, which hit the area in early September. However, Aspen Hill residents who were evacuated in June said they were still concerned about the safety of the dam should another event like June's storms occur.

Arthur Popper, who lives about 900 feet from Rock Creek on Parkvale Road, was one such resident who expressed concern over the safety of the 41-year-old dam.

He and other residents made several attempts to get more information on the dam from county officials, but met with little success at first. It was not until the group released a letter to

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the press at the end of August complaining about the lack of information available to the public that Park and Planning took notice.

Planning Board Chairman Royce Hanson read the group's letter and agreed to a request for a stakeholder-based citizen committee that would meet regularly with officials, Park and Planning spokeswoman Marion Joyce said in September.

A public information session also will be held, she added.

Popper said no meetings have been scheduled as of yet due to conflicting schedules, but there is the possibility of a meeting in November.

He added that he has also been in touch with Andrew Frank, project manager for Park and Planning, who has kept him updated on any dam developments.

"What I'm hearing [about the repairs] sounds good, but until I see more data I'm still concerned," Popper said.

County Park and Planning contracted an engineering firm, URS Corporation, headquartered in San Francisco with an office in Gaithersburg, to determine the cause of the seepage and to determine appropriate actions to make repairs.

A consensus developed that the cause of the seepage was flow through naturally occurring underground rock, as opposed to flow through the dam itself. In addition, there is concern that the dam's filter is not functioning as intended. The proposed remedial action, according to a report issued during last week's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee meeting, includes installation of a grout curtain in the fractured rock beneath and around the sides of the dam. The report also recommends constructing a surface filter drain on the downstream toe of the dam to collect and mitigate any additional seepage.

The Maryland Department of the Environment, which has jurisdiction over dams in Maryland, requires the implementation of remedial measures for the dam no later than March 31.