

# CITY OF WAITSBURG

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October 7, 2021

Dear Citizens of Waitsburg,

I want Waitsburg to continue to be a friendly small town where you know and care about your neighbors. Waitsburg must continue to be a safe community. The 2020 flood irrevocably altered the lives of our neighbors on the eastside of town. Families were displaced from their homes – some never to return again. Property damage racked up repair bills in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. I'm proud that during our City's darkest days; neighbors from throughout our City filled sandbags; helped rescue treasured family heirlooms and spent countless hours cleaning up mud. I am proud of the City staff members that spent many hours of overtime at all hours of the day and night ensuring our roads and utilities were maintained.

Since the flood, the City has worked hard to repair and upgrade the levee system along the Touchet River and Coppei Creek with the hope of preventing water spilling over the banks again. You have likely seen our crews out doing repair work with heavy equipment over the past two summers. In an effort to complete levee repairs and keep our community safe, we are at a crossroads.

There is a section of the levee system on the eastside of the City where we have asked 18 property owners to come together and decide if the City can access their property, up to 50 feet, to repair the levee. According to verbal and written feedback from the property owners – more than 75% of property owners along this section of the levee have agreed to participate in this repair effort. Not only could the levee repair save lives and property in the next flood, this repair work would be a significant cost-savings to the City and our citizens. Getting the levee back up to the US Army Corps of Engineers standards would transfer the levee back into the federal repair program where the Federal Government would come in and make levee repairs after flood events: covering 80% of the repair cost.

The City has no obligation to repair the levee because the City does not own any of the property. Unless each property owner along that section of the Touchet River agrees to let the City onto their property to do the work, the City cannot make the needed repairs. The City has no historical repair precedent because this part of the levee was formerly included in the Coppei Flood Control Districts responsibilities.

The City wants to repair the levee and take care of it for the foreseeable future. Protecting our City from floodwaters similar to what we saw in 2020 is the right thing to do. Through hosting meetings with the property owners and speaking to them one-on-one, the City has not been successful in getting four property owners to allow access so that the repairs can move forward. We have evaluated the City's budget and due to high cost of the project, we will not be able to compensate any property owner for property impacted to fix the levee and only ask that they provide access as a part of the project. The City Council will evaluate the status of owner buy-in at the Oct. 20 council meeting to decide if and how to take action on the project.

This is not a City Government issue; this is a community-wide issue. I believe we as a community can work together to solve this safety issue. While the City has not been successful in its efforts to date, I believe neighbors can share stories of the 2020 flood; recalling how frightening it was to wake up at 2 a.m. to flood water entering our homes. If you live along this stretch of river and want to see the levee repaired and your property protected; please reach out to your neighbors about the project and urge them to participate. It's time to have sincere, positive conversations to move us forward. If we do not fix this section of the levee, neighbors will be left in a vulnerable and dangerous position with limited help available from the City.

Should you like more information on this cooperative effort or the project in general, please feel free reach out to City Hall.

Sincerely,  
Mayor Marty Dunn and Waitsburg City Council

*“ONE OF A KIND”*