

28 March 2025

Via [disasterrecovery@detroitmi.gov](mailto:disasterrecovery@detroitmi.gov)

Julie Schneider, Director  
City of Detroit Housing and Revitalization Department  
Coleman A. Young Municipal Center  
2 Woodward Avenue - Suite 908  
Detroit, MI 48226

RE: Comments on CDBG-DR Draft Action Plan – February 27, 2025

Ms. Schneider:

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on Draft Action Plan (Plan) for Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) published on February 27, 2025.

The flood protection, so called, proposal discussed on pages 24-27 and 47-52 is the primary focus of this letter and comments contained herein. There are other elements of concern on page 29 which are also addressed here. Highlights of text on, as well as notes embedded in, those pages are included as attachments.

**Opposition to Stop Log and Flood Wall Proposal** – The Grantee CDBG-DR Mitigation Set Aside Program Number One referenced in the Plan and city officials participating in Public Meetings have noted that the \$20 million proposal matches the US Army Corps of Engineers (The Corps) Floodplain Management Services (FPMS) Study published in July 2022. The Jefferson-Chalmers community has made it clear that blocking access to any waterway as presented in the Study is not acceptable. Unrestricted access to the water everywhere, 24/7/365 must be part of any flood protection project.

We continue to be outraged/concerned by the Administration's unrelenting advancement of this concept, particularly since city officials assured the community that *"We heard the residents loud and clear. We are not going to look at that option. The community was strongly against it, and we should listen to the community"* pronounced Tyrone Clifton, Director of the Detroit Building Authority and one of the city officials who spoke to residents at the Tuesday meeting. See attached Detroit News, October 12, 2022 article.

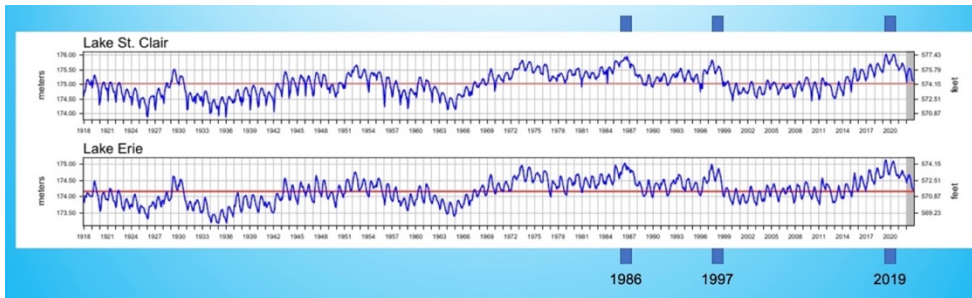
*Why does the Administration continue to advance a flood protection concept rejected by the community and contradict their prior commitment made to the community?*

**Historical Context and Flooding History** – Historic proposals from decades ago fail to recognize larger development forces, including the former designation as an Urban Renewal Community when the existing housing fabric was constantly at risk for eminent domain. Large, obsolete infrastructure investments would have segregated the community and effectively undermined property values, promoting the taking and clearance approach of Urban Renewal. By way of example, the large berm surrounding the southern edge of Victoria Park exacerbates the topographical swale that bisects the center of the community, thereby increasing the risk of flooding to homeowners outside the fence line.

At the same time, climate threats are greater in the interior of the community due to cloud bursts and infrastructure failures that cause basement back-ups, excess water unable to leave the community through catch basins and discharges from the Fox Creek Combined Sewage Overflow (CSO) located near East Jefferson and Ashland. While The Corps' FPMS Report focuses primarily on shoreline vulnerabilities related to future Great Lakes rise, the threat of high lake levels is decades away.

It commonly understood that it takes five consistent years of wet weather in the entirety of the Great Lakes basin – that's from Ottawa to Ohio - to cause lake levels to rise. While the Great Lakes are generally higher than they were 100 years ago, the high-water cycle is on a 20 to 30-year routine based upon National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration

(NOAA) and Corps data demonstrated in the graph below, borrowed from Figure 3, page 12 of the FPMS. The graph uses the North American Vertical Datum (NAVD).



As shown above, previous high lake levels were in 1997 and 1986 and according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), low ice cover leads to lower lake levels because reduced ice allows for increased evaporation. In February 2024, NOAA noted that Lakes Erie and Ontario are at

historic lows, not seen this low in since 1973. According to the NOAA Observed Water Levels at Station 9044049, Windmill Point, Michigan, between 2019 and 2022, water levels exceed 576.5' NAVD two-thirds of the time.

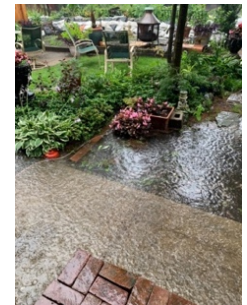
For the thirty (30) days of June 2021, the maximum water was 576.17' at 2:36 am on June 18, 2021. Yet, during the catastrophic storm on June 25-26, 2021, the CSO blasted water at such a volume that condoms were hanging from trees and sewage breached the shoreline along Fox Creek. Shoreline breach during and after CSO discharges is a common occurrence when water levels in the canal can rise as much as three (3') feet in minutes.

At the same time, the observed conditions along the western shoreline of Fox Creek suggest that nearly 20% is at 576.75" NAVD or lower.

Finally, several places along the Detroit River far exceed these levels, as documented by the City's Planning & Development Department in the Jefferson-Chalmers Neighborhood Framework Plan (2017) and Detroit Building Authority (DBA) Project 20370.00D (2023).



Condom in Tree following CSO discharge on June 25-26, 2021



Backyard Flooding along Fox Creek – June 2021

Finally, while the Jefferson-Chalmers community is 1.2 square miles, there is nearly 10 miles of shoreline. Any flood protection design must address shoreline vulnerabilities for the ENTIRE community with a comprehensive, parcel-by-parcel focused approach.

**Errors of Fact and Plan Inconsistencies**

<b>Conclusion of Mitigation Needs Assessment (page 27)</b>	
<p>1. Jefferson Chalmers Flooding and Floodplain Mitigation Project (preliminary estimate prior to engineering activities including feasibility due diligence and implementation costs - \$30MM)</p>	<p>The FPMS Report suggests the cost to be between \$161-170 million. While there are less expensive solutions, \$30 million is certainly not adequate. What other source of funding has been identified to provide comprehensive flood protection?</p>
<b>Program Description (page 49)</b>	
<p>The Plan states: "keep flood water and Detroit River water out of the sewer system and adjacent properties.</p> <p>This permanent fixture will <b>AID</b> in the removal of the floodplain designation . .</p> <p>. . . in the Jefferson Chalmers neighborhood<b>S</b> and surrounding neighborhoods.</p> <p>. . . Phillip . .</p> <p>. . include earthwork . . ."</p>	<p>Stop logs have a greater chance of causing more flooding from CSO discharges breaching the shoreline than from the chance of the Detroit River encroaching into the system decades from now.</p> <p>The use of the term "AID," is deceptive. Without a complete solution, this proposal will NOT remove the community from the floodplain.</p> <p>The Jefferson-Chalmers community is the <b>ONLY</b> community and the entirety of the community is in the floodplain. It is singular, not plural and there are no other "surrounding neighborhoods."</p> <p>The Lakewood and Philip canals are southern extensions of streets with the same name and Phillip is spelled incorrectly.</p> <p>Any earthwork must meet engineering performance standards including stability, seepage and settlement. Work proposed by</p>

	the Detroit Building Authority in other areas of the community has not met these standards.
These measures are intended to mitigate flood damages in the short term, until a more permanent solution is developed and implemented in the Jefferson-Chalmers region.	The Program Description twice states that the stop logs are “permanent fixtures,” therefore, these measures are not “short-term.” This comment contradicts earlier statements. The use of the term “region,” is inaccurate. Neighborhood or community would be more appropriate.

**Reducing Barriers for Assistance (page 52)**

The City of Detroit will conduct proactive, strategic communication and program outreach throughout the life cycle of the program to ensure that barriers will be readily identified and reduced. The success of this communication and outreach will heavily depend on the levels of engagement from key community stakeholders and the City’s responsiveness to any and all identified issues.	<p>The Corps began its FPMS work in August 2019. The community first learned of its efforts and conclusions in May 2022. No community consultation occurred during its efforts and while the community challenged its conclusions and the Options presented, the final report published in July 2022 was unchanged.</p> <p>Over 500 residents attended the October 11, 2022 meeting at Hope Community Church and spoke with one voice in opposition to the proposal.</p> <p>The DBA failed to comply with two (2) of its own funding agreements (07.21.22, Exhibit A and contracts (Giffels-Webster’s Professional Services Agreements Scope of Services 12.15.22 – Exhibit A, pages 2 and 3) and conduct community meetings as required.</p> <p>The City has demonstrated its inability to conduct any kind of effective communication with any stakeholder and no amount of additional outreach will change the community’s position regarding this matter. Failure to respond to and comply with the community’s posture could likely result in litigation and delay removing the floodplain.</p>
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**Hazard Mitigation (page 24-25)**

Hazard Mitigation Assessment, Hazard Risk Charts on page 24 and 25	The Charts provide no insight on the basis for scoring. In addition, the absence of an explanation and no key for scoring make them impossible to interpret, understand, or challenge the conclusions and content. Additional details and/or explanation should be provided.
More importantly, Chart 2 and comments that accompany the charts state, “flooding is at the forefront of Detroit’s hazard risks”	The proposed flood protection solution is incomplete and will not effectively mitigate that risk.
“reduce the. potential of losses” and do not “prevent Detroit’s vulnerability to flood disaster events.”	Because the mitigation activities are incomplete, they actually fail to meet the prescribed goal.

**USACE Floodplain Management Services Study (FPMS) (page 49)**

The Plan quotes the FPMS Study and states: “the these efforts (referring to sand bags and Tiger Dams) were successful in mitigating all damages.”	As noted in the photos below, the Tiger Dams caused damage to property and failed to protect the community from flooding. It took over three (3) years to remove them after they failed. This reference is inaccurate and should be stricken.
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Damage from Tiger Dam



Failed and Relocated Tiger Dams



Tiger Dam Removal

The Plan references the FPMS and states: "In preparation for 2020 flooding, the City of Detroit employed additional temporary flood protection defenses, including HESCO barriers . . ."	There were no HESCO barriers installed. This reference is inaccurate and should be stricken.
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**Design + Engineering Feasibility** – The topographical and water level statistics are important because the closing of the canals and construction of a flood wall will cause greater damage to a larger portion of the community when surface flooding caused by underground infrastructure failures are made worse by massive CSO discharges that breach the Fox Creek shoreline. Any flood protection investment must be part of a comprehensive solution that protects the entire community from all of the various flooding threats.

At the same time, a parcel-by-parcel focused approach will ensure the most effective use of limited public resources through the selection of natural/rip-rap seawall sections appropriate for the size of the canal and scale of watercraft. In the DBA’s Detroit Lower East Side Flood Mitigation Project (Project 20370.00D [2023]), the DBA and Giffels-Webster specified a 9.43” sheet pile section more than THREE times the size required for residential development and small watercraft shoreline application (3.125”).

Additionally, any earthwork must meet engineering performance standards, including stability, seepage and settlement. Work proposed by the above noted DBA Project in other areas of the community in the past has not met these standards.

Finally, City officials have asserted that FEMA is requiring a publicly-owned flood protections solution. Written proof of the requirement has been requested and should be provided.

**Environmental Impact** – Prior to Detroit’s Bankruptcy, the Water and Sewerage Department conducted a backwash of Fox Creek nearly every week, and after each CSO discharge. This occurred by opening the Fox Creek Gates at Jefferson and Ashland, which lowered the level of the canal and drew fresh water into it. This helped improve the water quality of a waterway that no longer has a water shed to feed it. The Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) has only completed this operation once following the catastrophic storm in June 2021.

Stop logs will stagnate the water, undermine the urban waterway’s unique ecosystem, exacerbate and worsen water quality, cause significant environmental degradation, and turn Fox Creek and linked canals into a cesspool. Preventing the constant flow of water encouraged by watercraft of all kinds will create conditions where insects will thrive and become a nuisance.

At the same time, CSO discharges, will have two detrimental impacts. First, raising the water level in Fox Creek as much as three (3’) feet, causing a likely breach of the shoreline with flooding filled with sewage settling in the center of the neighborhood. Secondly, the trapped sewage will function as fertilizer causing an overgrowth of algae, consuming oxygen. When the algae eventually dies, the oxygen in the water is consumed and the lack of dissolved oxygen makes it impossible for aquatic life to survive.

**Economic Impact** – With the exception of Victoria Park and Clairpointe Woods, waterfront properties in the Jefferson-Chalmers are some of the highest valued throughout the neighborhood. Beyond the environmental degradation that will occur during stop log and flood wall operation, limiting access to the water will undermine property values and have a negative ripple effect throughout the entire neighborhood.

In addition, even a temporary blockage of any kind will permanently damage and destroy the economic vitality of water-based businesses that benefit from expenditures by visitors, boaters and fisherman from throughout metropolitan Detroit. This includes residents that rent boat slips, entrepreneurs offering fish tackle, fuel purchases, watercraft rental, tours, Gregory Boat Club and more notably, KAM Marine and Bayview Yacht Club.

The stop logs and flood gates will also undermine any incentive individual property owners may have to upgrade their shoreline or invest in their property.

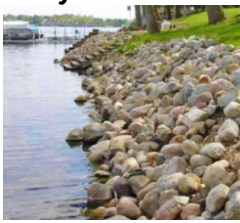
**Operations + Maintenance** – The Tiger Dam failures combined with damages done to property during their installation as well as delays associated with their removal demonstrate that City agencies responsible for these matters were unable to protect property owners during and after the flooding events of 2019 and 2020. As discussed earlier, the breaches following the massive CSO associated with the June 25, 2021 event destroyed and pushed the Tiger Dams over 100’ from their installed location.

The lack of coordination, combined with apparent failures in technical expertise from various City agencies and its consultants, along with ignoring the community and reversing its position on the subject of canal closures and floodwalls, undermines our confidence and trust in the City.

Additionally, while The Corps and State's Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy have regulatory authority over construction in water ways, they have no jurisdiction of shoreline height and materials. The City has no authority to regulate the shoreline of residential waterfront properties

Further, the Jefferson-Chalmers community's floodplain is a unique and complex matter. The proposed closure structures require technical skills, expertise that does not exist within any City agency. Given potential shoreline vulnerabilities, it is possible that the closure structures may have to be deployed for as long as 10-11 months. This would have a catastrophic and detrimental impact on the community and therefore, this approach should be abandoned.

**Alternative Proposal** – Over six months, twenty-seven design, engineering, environmental and construction professionals contributed to an Engineering Report (Report) issued in March 2023. A collection of projects contained within the Report, when taken provide a **parcel-by-parcel focused solution with a variety of alternatives**. This Flood Protection Projects includes natural shoreline, rip-rap and appropriately sized seawalls that will create a single line of defense of future Great Lakes, protect against CSO flooding while also **ensuring unrestricted access to the water everywhere 24/7/365**.



Natural/Rip-Rap



Seawalls



Comprehensive parcel-by-parcel Focused solution

This comprehensive approach was used to secure a \$1M appropriation from the State Legislature with funds to be used to assist low-income property owners improve their shoreline.

**DWSD Flood Mitigation Projects, Under Study – East, Jefferson-Chalmers Direct Discharge System, \$73.0M** (page 29) – DWSD should learn from the lessons and mistakes from GLWA and their proposed Freud Pump Station. According to the referenced chart, this project is the highest priority and already under design. The community should be engaged immediately.

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In closing, we are unified in our desire to remove the Jefferson-Chalmers neighborhood from the FEMA 100-Year Floodplain and are confident residents and stakeholders are committed to work with the City to find a reasonable solution to overcome this challenge.

Again, we thank you for this opportunity comment on the Draft Action Plan and look forward to your response. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 313.802.2294 or [info@jeffersonchalmerswaterproject.org](mailto:info@jeffersonchalmerswaterproject.org).

Sincerely yours,

Jay C. Juergensen  
Lead Organizer and Technical Expert

Comments on the Draft Action Plan - 2023 Allocation  
Provided by the Jefferson-Chalmers WATER Project  
Submitted March 28, 2025



**CITY OF DETROIT  
PUBLIC ACTION PLAN FOR  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT - DISASTER  
RECOVERY (CDBG-DR)**



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**Julie Schneider, Director  
Housing and Revitalization Department  
Coleman A. Young Municipal Center  
2 Woodward Avenue, Suite 908  
Detroit, MI 48226**

**Prepared by: Housing and  
Revitalization Department  
(HRD)**

**Mayor, Mike Duggan**



<sup>1</sup> WXYZ Detroit – “Photo Gallery – Major storms cause flooding across Metro Detroit”





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## Flood Risk Mitigation Projects Long Term



Through the work of grant funded studies, DWSD is developing concepts for over \$1.0B in long term strategies to mitigate flooding and reduce CSOs to the Detroit River and Rouge River.



<b>Under Study – East</b>		Projects are part of ongoing or future studies. As a result, highly-conservative, order of magnitude project cost estimates and earliest dates for construction estimated below	
<b>Jefferson Chalmers Direct Discharge System</b>	Construction of collection sewers, detention and pump stations for direct discharge to river.	\$73.0M	2030
<b>Bedford Sewer District/Fox Creek Stormwater Only Conversion</b>	Reconfiguration of Bedford Sewer, Fox Creek and Fox Creek Relief stormwater only in Morningside Neighborhood.	\$100.0M	2030
<b>Morningside/East English Village Optimization Sewers</b>	Construction of sewers that balance flow between surcharged and underutilized sewers.	\$50.0M	2028
<b>Small Scale GSI – Fox Creek Neighborhood</b>	Construction of block scale GSI to help reduce impacts of stormwater runoff on the combined sewer system.	\$25.0M	2028
<b>Large Scale GSI – Riverbend Neighborhood</b>	Construction of an offline stormwater detention pond to attenuate flow prior to direct discharge to the Fox Creek.	\$50.0M	2029
<b>Fischer Sewer District Stormwater Only Conversion</b>	Reconfiguration of sewers within the Fischer sewer district. Work will repurpose the outfall for stormwater only.	\$250.0M	2032
<b>Meldrum Sewer District Direct Discharge</b>	Construction of stormwater only sewers and direct discharge to the Detroit River downstream of Lieb Screening Facility.	\$65.0M	2034
<b>Near East Side Sewer Direct Discharge</b>	Construction of stormwater only sewers and direct discharge to the Detroit River.	\$150.0M	2036
<b>DWSD COSTS</b>		<b>\$763.0 M</b>	

DWSD should learn from the lessons and mistakes from GLWA and their proposed Freud Pump Station. According to the referenced chart, this project is the highest priority and already under design. The community should be engaged immediately.

<b>Under Study – West</b>		Projects are part of future studies. As a result, highly-conservative, order of magnitude project cost estimates and earliest dates for construction estimated below	
<b>McNichols West Relief Sewer Stormwater Conversion</b>	Water quality improvements for west service yard for direct discharge site.	\$90.0M	2030
<b>Michigan/Martin Capacity Enhancement Projects</b>	Sewer upsizing, impervious removal and offline detention to reduce flooding in SW Detroit.	\$100.0M	2032
<b>McNichols East Relief Sewer Stormwater Conversion</b>	Water quality improvements for west service yard for direct discharge site.	\$60.0M	2034
<b>DWSD COSTS</b>		<b>\$250.0 M</b>	

### IV. FAIR HOUSING AND CIVIL RIGHTS DATA COLLECTION

Household Language By Household Limited English Speaking Status

Locality	Language	Households	Limited English Speaking Household	Percent Limited English Speaking Household
Detroit	Spanish	14,858	3,492	24%
	Other Indo-European Languages	4,414	1,086	24%

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Chalmers area. This study looks at concept-level alternatives and does not provide a feasibility level solution, nor does it include design efforts.

**Eligible Geographic Areas:** This mitigation project will serve the neighborhoods bordered by Clairepointe Street (W), E. Jefferson Avenue (N), Alter Road (E), Detroit River (S), and will also provide relief to adjacent parcels to the north of E. Jefferson Avenue (Clairepointe to Alter) that are currently designated in the Special Flood Hazard Area (0.2% Annual Chance Flood).

<https://hazards-fema.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8b0adb51996444d4879338b5529aa9cd> (Type "Jefferson Chalmers, Detroit, MI" in search box - zoom to area – blue zone = Coastal Floodplain) roughly bounded by Conner/Clairepointe Avenues (West Boundary), E. Jefferson Avenue (North Boundary), Alter Road (East Boundary) and the Detroit River (South Boundary)

<https://hazards-fema.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8b0adb51996444d4879338b5529aa9cd> (Type "Jefferson Chalmers, Detroit, MI" in search box zoom to area – orange zone = 0.2% Annual Chance Flooding) roughly bounded by Conner Avenue (West Boundary), Kercheval Avenue (North Boundary), Alter Road (East Boundary) and E. Jefferson Avenue (South Boundary)

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**Other Eligibility Criteria:** N/A

**Maximum Amount of Assistance Per Beneficiary:** This project is an area benefit, and not a direct benefit to a beneficiary.

**Maximum Income of Beneficiary:** At or below 80% AMI

**Mitigation Measures:** The project will prevent future flooding due to cyclical and rising Great Lakes levels and aid in the removal of FEMA floodplain designation for the entire Jefferson Chalmers neighborhood and adjacent neighborhoods as noted above. Installation of permanent structures for 3 stop log (aka "temporary, removable dam panel") sites across Lakewood, Phillip and Fox Creek canals. The stop logs will be installed temporarily during months of high Great Lakes levels, then removed and stored until needed again. Earthwork berms are proposed in Mariners, Riverfront - Lakewood East, AB Ford and Maheras Gentry Parks, and a floodwall at KAM Marine/Bayview Yacht Club is also proposed.

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Jefferson Chalmers on the lower eastside boasts more than 160 acres of waterfront parks, boat launches, fishing access and outdoor recreation opportunities, according to the City of Detroit website page about the community. Part of the community includes the Canal District, which is sometimes called "The Venice of Detroit." It includes the communities of Fox Creek, Harbor Island and Klenk Island. Some homes line a series of canals from the Detroit River almost to Jefferson Avenue.

Clearly, the canals are part of this eastside's community identity. But now due to more flooding, sewage backups and inadequate seawalls, the city needs to find a way to protect the neighborhood from further damage. Tuesday's meeting was just one in a series of public dialogues, federal studies and other actions.

City officials presented two options to residents Tuesday night, according to a copy of the presentation provided by the city. One option was to create a "major fine/litigation strategy" toward property owners to ensure they are maintaining secure seawalls on their properties. According to the document, 43% of property owners on the water have deficient seawalls.

Last year, after summer flooding, more residences near the Detroit River canals were designated a "Special Flood Hazard Area" by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). That designation makes it much harder for the city to get federal grants for the community because it is considered to be at risk for future damage, city officials have said in the past. It often means homeowners need to buy pricey flood insurance.

Wednesday's meeting is one in series of public discussions about the canals and how to improve the infrastructure to prevent more damage. Next week, the city holds another meeting that deals with how Jefferson Chalmers and the canals can benefit from a \$57.5 million grant from the Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery. The fund is intended to help Detroit residents recover from the June 25-26, 2021 floods and to build resilient systems and infrastructure to combat climate change.

*laquilar@detroitnews.com*