



Venice Island – Stop Development in the Floodway

December 10, 2007

Carol Collier, Executive Director

Delaware River Basin Commission

P. O. Box 7360

West Trenton, New Jersey 08628

Docket Number D-2207-30-1, Venice One Development

Docket Number D-2007-36-1, Waterford Apartments at Cotton Street Development

Dear Ms. Collier,

Delaware Riverkeeper Network strongly objects to the approval of the applications for the Venice One and for Waterford Apartments at Cotton Street, both located in Manayunk Section of the City of Philadelphia, PA on Venice Island in the Schuylkill River, a tributary to the Delaware River.

Venice One: Delaware Riverkeeper Network has reviewed the DRBC files on this project, which shows that the development project is located on Venice Island and that the Venice One development is entirely within the floodway of the Schuylkill River, according to FEMA's Flood Rate Insurance Map (FIRM). The Commission's floodplain regulations require that the FIRM is to be used to delineate the floodplain when an official floodplain map exists.^[1] The location of this project requires review by the Commission.

The developer submitted a report that calculates the pre- and post- development water surface elevations at Venice Island. The report states that the conditions are "indistinguishable" since the output water level profile for both pre- and post- development are the same.^[2] A supplementary report was produced that reflected changes to the Island's proposed developments, specifically to Venice Island Condominiums. The report concludes, "...the Venice Island Condominiums will not result in any significant change in the 100-year flood levels on the Schuylkill River. In fact, local water levels will be lower following development".^[3]

This report and its conclusions are irrelevant to the issue at hand. As far as the Commission's Flood Plain Regulations are concerned the only question is whether the proposed development is on the floodway or not. The Commission's definition of Floodway is the "channel of the watercourse and those portions of the adjoining floodplains which are reasonably required to carry and discharge the regulatory flood (100 year flood)".^[4] The Commission's floodplain regulations do not allow residential development within the floodway. As per the regulations, no "structure for occupancy at any time by humans or animals" is allowed in the floodway.^[5]

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We note that a Letter of Map Revision revising the floodway location is needed from the Federal Emergency Management Agency BEFORE this project could move ahead. The FIRM map then must be revised by FEMA to show that the floodway has indeed been redesignated. We point out that the National Flood Insurance Program is available to communities that conform to FEMA regulations and that any violation of these regulations affects the eligibility of the City's residents to this essential flood insurance coverage.

Waterford Apartments at Cotton Street Development: This proposed development site is also located within the floodway of the Schuylkill River. Delaware Riverkeeper Network opposes the approval of the Docket for this development on the same grounds that we oppose the Venice One proposal. This proposed project is located in the floodway of the Schuylkill River, which, according to Commission Flood Plain Regulations, is prohibited from being built.

We note that the developer issued a supplemental report that claimed that the Waterford Apartments "would not result in any significant change in the 100-year flood levels on the Schuylkill River".^[6] Again this conclusion is irrelevant considering the prohibition of this project at this location.

Summary: We point out that the costs of flood damages continue to rise locally and nationally. Historically, on a nationwide basis, floods have caused more economic loss than any other natural hazard.^[7] Pennsylvania alone has experienced 53,535 losses from flood damages with a payout of \$724,929,338.86 as of 2/28/2007.^[8]

Aside from the legalities, it is wrong from a policy perspective to construct new development in the floodway. It is also irresponsible to knowingly place people and their homes in harms way, to place structures in the floodplain - retarding the ability of the floodplain to function as nature intended - and it is foolish to expose emergency personnel to the hazards of rescue and recovery. Further, it is a poor economic decision to allow new development where the river floods, expecting taxpayers to cover the costs of rebuilding and repairing the damage. In sum, these development projects make no sense on regulatory, policy, environmental, and safety grounds and should not be given approvals for construction.

Attached is a DRN Fact Sheet which outlines our concerns and perspectives concerning floodplain protection.

Delaware Riverkeeper Network is opposed to both the above referenced docket approvals and respectfully requests that the Commission deny approval based on the unresolved conflict with Commission Flood Plain Regulations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Maya K. van Rossum
the Delaware Riverkeeper

Tracy Carluccio
Deputy Director

[1]

Delaware River Basin Commission Flood Plain Regulations, section 6.4.4.A.

[2]

Weggel, J. Richard, P.E., "Flood Hazard Analysis for Proposed Development on Venice Island, Manayunk, Philadelphia, PA", 2000, page 11.

[3]

Weggel, J. Richard, P.E., "Flood Hazard Analysis for Proposed Development on Venice Island, Manayunk, Philadelphia, PA, Second Supplemental Report", 3 March 2007, page 6.

[4]

DRBC Flood Plain Regulations, section 6.1.2B.

[5]

DRBC Flood Plain Regulations, section 6.3.2A.1.

[6]

Weggel, J. Richard, P.E., "Supplement to Flood Hazard Analysis for Proposed Development on Venice Island, Manayunk, Philadelphia, PA", 23 April 2007, page A8.

[7]

Congressional Research Service, Report to Congress, Federal Flood Insurance: The Repetitive Loss Problem (June 30, 2005, (<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL32972.pdf>).

[8]

http://bsa.nfipstat.com/reports/104_200702.htm#42