

City of Welch, WV to Address Flooding and Infrastructure Concerns Public Hearing Set for April 6th, 2021 at 6pm

For Immediate Release: Welch, WV, the county seat of McDowell County, a city of historical significance and a population center for the area is plagued with a road infrastructure issue that is dangerous and problematic for citizens. The public is invited to a meeting, Tuesday, April 6th at 6pm located at 600 Stewart St., formerly the National Guard Armory in Welch to discuss the critical need for a bridge over the low-lying area that connects the main artery of Rt. 16, near downtown, to the regional hospital Welch Community Hospital and the federal prison.

“West Virginia residents losing their life just half a mile away from the hospital and the dialysis center because of a flooded road in Welch, WV is unacceptable. Doctors and nurses being driven down a railroad track on an ATV to do their jobs is not practical or safe, and we need to do better for McDowell County, WV. The City of Welch is cut off and divided by floodwaters several times a year. Even a security breach at the prison could be very problematic for first responders. Building a bridge over the railroad crossing, will ensure traffic flow even during times of flooding. The city has the opportunity to obtain federal support to carry out this desperately needed infrastructure project and I hope our citizens will voice their support for this effort,” said McDowell County Commissioner, Cody Estep.

The scenario of someone losing their life just half a mile away from the hospital and a significant increase in the amount of traffic accidents in the area compelled Mayor Harold McBride to look for a permanent solution to address the problem. The obvious solution is to build a bridge over the railroad crossing, safeguarding traffic flow during flooding, and ensuring higher clearance vehicles to use the road safely.

“We’ve lost school buses, truck trailers, RVs,” said Mayor Harold McBride about the frequent traffic delays caused by large vehicles not using the proper lane. “It’s an ongoing issue that has an easy solution if we can get Congressional funding support to make it a reality. Additionally, we are now prohibited from crossing the railroad tracks legally, so we need to look at other options to safeguard our residents,” he concluded.

The project is estimated to cost approximately \$6-10 million dollars, according to the West Virginia Division of Highways, and would be underwritten by Congressional support and federal funds. Additional savings would also be found in repurposing the current pumping station at that location to the other problematic underpass at Coney Island, which serves as a key connector between State Routes (16, 52 and 123.) Significance future savings will be devoted to potential maintenance and flood cleanup efforts.

In addition to seeking community support of the project at the scheduled public meeting, Welch has received support from other elected officials, including State Senator Rollan Roberts.

“Welch has long served the southern part of the state with dignity, but for many years, Welch has been plagued with a couple of main highway arteries in and out of the city that desperately need corrected because of flooding issues,” said Senator Roberts in a newsletter urging support of the project earlier in the summer.

"If it fits the federal criteria, to solve this city's two major problems, congressionally appropriated funding would be an acceptable expenditure, because both flooding problems block access to and from the hospital and the federal prison," said Senator Roberts. "The flooding crisis has been exacerbated by the city receiving more rainfall in recent years. These two infrastructure failures are now causing life and death scenarios, should be made priorities, and not ignored any longer," he wrote.

The public is invited to send questions or comments to jason@cityofwelch.com or to attend the meeting located at 600 Stewart St., formerly the National Guard Armory, at 6pm on Tuesday, April 6th.

Welch is a city located in McDowell County, West Virginia at the confluence of the Tug and Elkhorn rivers. Incorporated in 1893, its history showcases the Appalachian perseverance that helped build America. It is the county seat of McDowell County and located in the heart of the mountains of Coal Country, USA. Visit www.cityofwelch.com for more information.

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Flooding along Rt. 16 in Welch, WV causes critical access issue.