

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

March 15, 2021

Robert J. Fenton, Jr.
Senior Official Performing the Duties of FEMA Administrator
Office of the Administrator
FEMA Headquarters
500 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20472

David Maurstad, Region II Acting Administrator
FEMA Region II
26 Federal Plaza, Suite 1307
New York, NY 10278
CC: Kevin Sullivan, Region II External Affairs

Dear Acting Administrator Fenton and Region II Acting Administrator Maurstad,

We write today in regard to the current status of the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) for the Township of Pequannock in Morris County, New Jersey. We urge you to take swift action to resolve outstanding issues with the preliminary map, and to work collaboratively with the Township of Pequannock to finalize an accurate map that accounts for all relevant technical information.

This process began in 2016 when the preliminary Flood Insurance Rate Maps (pFIRM) for Morris County were released, which were then appealed by the Township of Pequannock. What has followed has been a protracted multi-year process with multiple delays in FEMA's appeals procedures, including the Township not being informed of the Scientific Review Panel option, FEMA never completing the Community Consultation Process outlined in its own procedures, and the initial withholding of scientifically-relevant computer models from the appeals process under a nuanced technicality.

In June of 2020, a Scientific Review Panel (SRP) ruled unanimously in the Township's favor, stating that the FEMA maps did not meet National Flood Insurance Program mapping standards. In addition, the full report noted that FEMA's lack of community engagement was problematic, and that their initial rejection of the Township's appeal and consideration of the Township's technical data was "disingenuous at best." The SRP recommended a coordinated effort between FEMA and the Township, including regular technical discussions, to determine the floodway and updates to the current models. In July 2020, FEMA accepted the SRP's decision. A letter from Michael Moriarty, Director of FEMA's Region II Mitigation Division, dated July 31, 2020, promised that the agency would coordinate with the community on next steps "in the next few months." Since then, there has been little progress and limited communication from FEMA. Despite a follow-up meeting held at the Township's request on October 23, 2020, FEMA did not take any action on this matter until February 2021, when the agency finally generated a work order for its consultants to revise the models based on the SRP's findings.

These extensive delays have created real and tangible adverse impacts on Pequannock and our constituents. In addition to the costs and resources expended by this small community to appeal these maps, the pFIRMs have caused great uncertainty in the housing market and requirements for flood insurance. Residents have experienced difficulty selling their homes, obtaining mortgages or home equity loans, or pursuing home improvements, and we understand that their home values have decreased by up to 25 percent. The pFIRM

increases the percentage of structures in the floodplain to 21%, and the number of structures in the floodway from 6 to 336.

Under any circumstances, this economic uncertainty would be difficult to bear, but during the current pandemic, the impact is magnified. Getting the final FIRM correct is clearly a matter of great economic significance to this town and its residents.

To that end, the Township has put considerable resources into understanding the flood risk to their residents, and in July 2020, with what we understand to be FEMA's concurrence, hired a consultant at their own expense to develop models that comply with the SRP recommendations in order to expedite the process. The Township's consultants are a willing partner in ensuring that the final FIRMs reflect the best scientific and on-the-ground information available, and submitted their work to FEMA on October 5, 2020. At this phase in the process, we ask that you act in the most expeditious manner possible, independently validating the work already completed by your partners on the ground and incorporating it into the modeling process where possible.

At a recent meeting on February 26, 2021, we understand that FEMA relayed to Pequannock that the remapping process would take an additional 24 months, delaying the adoption of maps until 2023, and that FEMA will not consider any further submissions of updated modeling from the community. This delay is not acceptable – especially if it results in FEMA Region II executing a partial adoption of the pFIRM in Morris County, when these map changes could have an impact on other riverine communities throughout the county.

As the SRP resolution process continues to be developed by FEMA, this example in Pequannock should be an important consideration. We can all agree that a key goal of the FIRM adoption process is ensuring that the most accurate, science-based maps, reflecting the true flood risk in our communities, are adopted as efficiently as possible. We are concerned that defaulting to a full re-mapping process from scratch after a successful SRP appeal, especially when supplemental information already exists that could accelerate the process, may serve as a deterrent to future communities utilizing the SRP process.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact our offices if you have questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress