Army Corp of Engineers-New Orleans District
C/O Amy Dixon
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Ted and Theresa Harmon
[redacted]
Slidell, LA 70461
[redacted]

Subject: Concerns and Recommendations Regarding the St. Tammany Parish Levee Project

Dear Ms. Amy Dixon,

You do not know me, but I was given your name by another concerned citizen you have spoken to on the above subject. I am writing to express my deep concerns, displeasure, and provide recommendations regarding the St. Tammany Parish Levee Project, specifically concerning the exclusion of my property from its protection. As a concerned resident, I believe it is vital to address various issues related to this project to ensure the safety, well-being, and fairness for all members of our community.

1. Accelerate and Improve Fritchie Marsh Restoration
I strongly recommend accelerating and enhancing the ongoing Fritchie Marsh restoration project, as it holds significant potential to reduce storm surge. Proper restoration of the marsh could result in a substantial drop in surge levels, providing some degree of storm surge protection. You can find detailed information about this project in attachment (A) Fritchie Marsh Creation and Terracing (PO-173) source.

2. Collaboration with DOTD and CPRA for Surge Mitigation
I urge you to collaborate with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) and the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) to explore surge mitigation strategies using Hwy 90 and 190 East. A similar study for surge mitigation using Hwy 11 and Lakeshore Drive (Rat's Nest Road) is already underway. The Hwy 190 restoration and bridge replacement project should be activated soon, presenting an opportunity to maximize further reductions in storm surge through structural changes to highway and bridge design.

3. Change Funding Allocation for Residential Protection Strategies
I propose a change in funding allocation language within the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) budget. Currently, the focus is primarily on home slab elevation, which may not be the most cost-effective or efficient strategy. I suggest amending the language to allow for a range of residential protection strategies, similar to the options available for businesses. Such a change would align with the USACE study's recommendations and could lead to more effective and

affordable solutions for homeowners, especially homeowners who are on fixed- and/or retirement incomes.

4. Consider Alternative Levee Sites
I request a thorough evaluation of alternative levee sites, including alignments that extend along Hwy 190 and/or Military Road. All proposed alignments currently leave some residents outside of protection, which raises concerns about the fairness and equity of the project.

5. Collaboration on a Surge Barrier Plan
I strongly recommend joining the Lake Coalition to explore the feasibility of using the CSX railroad as a surge barrier. This plan has the potential to close five openings, preventing surges of up to 10 feet. While it may require extensive coordination, including involvement at a Cabinet level, it could offer a cost-effective and efficient solution to protect our community.

6. Full Upfront Coverage of Home Elevation Costs
All costs associated with the elevation of homes due to the levee placement and changes in water flow should be covered upfront, as it is unreasonable to expect residents to bear these costs before qualifying for grants. In visiting my local community, the FEMA rules on elevation should be removed.

7. Impact on Local Schools
An assessment of the impact on local schools, particularly those in areas excluded from the levee, must be conducted. The disregard for property, community, and the tax base could have long-term negative consequences for our education system which is directly related to jobs and thus a core responsibility of the army Corp of engineer to address as part of this and any other proposal.

8. Oversight Entity for Funding Allocation:
The creation of an independent entity, separate from St. Tammany Parish and Louisiana, to ensure fair and transparent allocation of project funds, free from potential biases or political influence and diversion of funds to other programs, interests etc.... Funds would be managed for Education, Vocation, Elevation, Relocation, Mitigation, levee maintenance, etc....

9. Options for Affected Residents:
Total Buyout: Offer a total buyout of property by the federal government, including relocation costs. These buyouts should be fair market value as of 2021 when the project was started. Offers such as those made for Avery Estates have shown that many will be unable to find new housing, move themselves, elevate their property or secure insurance/funding for new homes if homeowners are not adequately compensated. Additionally addressing this early with homeowners living in their single-family homes would prevent unnecessary delays, lawsuits etc... by current residents who've had buy-in to a process that has not been transparent. The buy-out process should also be handled by a dedicated, non-affiliated entity as described above in paragraph 8, ensuring that the fair-market price is fair to both sides, not just the federal government. The reality is that the homeowner is always unduly compensated in buy-out programs, leaving them in a much poorer state than they anticipated.

10. Moratorium on Building:
Implement a moratorium on all new building in the area and within 50 minutes of the levee to protect existing residents. This would ensure that all monies earmarked for elevation and based on numbers from 2021 should be applied only to homes owned at time of project completion by private homeowners who owned homes at the time of project inception and completion.

11. Local Job Training:
Creation of a training program for Louisiana residents to participate in the levee's construction, providing long-term, family-wage job opportunities that are long term and local hires. Provide programs for residents who can no longer work in their current employment due to the hardships brought upon by increased and excess travel, higher medical insurance, and taxes brought about by the levee systems.

12. Tax Refunds:
Provide tax refunds to homeowners in single-family dwellings outside the levee as compensation for project costs that they will not benefit from.

13. Impact on local healthcare
Creation of a healthcare fund to protect healthcare access to the community that will be impacted by the levee location and changes in access to hospitals and clinics that may be close by, but with significant changes in roads and community will change.

14. Relocation costs for religious institutions and their congregations
Churches, synagogue, temples must receive funding and help in maintaining traditions, services, and access to their community. Costs should not increase for churches that will be responsible for caring for a community that will be impacted monetarily by the loss of good paying jobs that pay taxes in an area that will be negatively impacted. Additionally, Churches and religious organization spend large sums of money during disaster relief and should be compensated for all money increases that are passed on to them (and their members) for care of their congregations in providing disaster relief, food, and labor due to placement of the levee.

15. Compensation to homeowners and small businesses for additional costs of flood insurance. In visiting with our neighbors there are multiple strings attached to FEMA and other money including but not limited to a requirement to hold certain levels of insurance. Many small businesses, startup businesses and home businesses are struggling in this community. With a potential exodus of residents who are well paid and technically advanced (thus able to leave Louisiana) small businesses will be impacted. Compensation must be considered for those businesses who may shutter without the needed customer base which will change with the levee.

Additional Information and Questions for Clarification
To better understand the project and its implications, I kindly request the following information and answers to the following questions:

1. Which Flood Control Act authorizes this levee project, and what are the specific provisions of this act?

2. Has a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review been conducted for this project? If so, what were the findings regarding environmental impacts?
3. What are the engineering standards being used for the levee's construction, and is there a projected timeline for the project's milestones?
4. What is the projected economic impact of the levee on major local employers, such as military and space complexes?
5. Is there a plan for long-term maintenance of the levee, and who will be responsible for it? It is well known that upkeep is expensive and necessary.
6. How can residents access updates or changes to the project plans to ensure transparency and public input?
7. How/When will St Tammany residents vote on a levee tax? Who will pay for the levee?
8. Has a plan been established for movement or removal of sacred burial sites including family sites and religious or traditional rites? What costs have been set aside for this?
9. Has an evaluation been done on the new representation of taxpayers with this project?
10. Will the communications between levee entities and communities be transparent henceforth? It is my firm opinion that the lack of information flow and invited citizen participation is negligent, appalling, and breeds mistrust between both sides; and only open communication from the powers will negate the mistrust and educate neighbors.

My biggest complaint is as a resident in my neighborhood for more than 5 years, I have received NO communications for these plans, nor invitations to meetings to voice my concerns. If not for the sharp diligence of several concerned citizens, these issues would have blind-sighted me and many of my neighbors. All which is causing my biggest complaint that the entire plan has the feel of deception by the powers-to-be, quite like having "the wool pulled over one's eyes." We choose our home after I worked for over 48 years and my husband nearly 60 years, to live in for our "golden years." This plan has us seriously reexamining our plan to see if other options are better for us—in another state. Since most of our children and grandchildren are also residents here, the thought breaks our hearts. But if the Parish, State, and Levee boards proceed with the plan as written, we will not have any other viable option.

I believe that addressing these concerns and questions will lead to a more equitable and effective levee project that prioritizes the safety and well-being of all residents. I look forward to your response and hope for a constructive dialogue on this matter.

Sincerely,

Ted W Harmon

Theresa M Harmon

Ted and Theresa Harmon