

The flood of 1989

A year later, fear still runs high

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

TODAY — THE anniversary of what has been called the flood of 1989 — Kendallwood and Westbrook Manor subdivision residents still fear another storm that will fill basements and lower-level family rooms with a sea of sewage and storm water.

"Every time I hear a weather report, I get scared as hell," said Westbrook resident Max Simon. A year ago, one-third of his home was under water.

He isn't alone. "We get pretty nervous, especially this time of the year," said Westbrook resident Joann Graves, chairwoman of the Westbrook-Kendallwood Flood Committee. "As soon as we see the rain come, we still get pretty worried."

A year ago today, the Obervia's phones rang off the hook. At the other end were voices of worried and distraught residents watching their homes swell with sewage.

Residents told of toilet paper and spaghetti floating in their basements; of manhole covers dancing on columns of water; of leaving their dream homes as the water poured in.

GRAVES, SIMON and other committee members surveyed residents for damage; no total estimates were made. But some residents said damage to their homes was in the tens of thousands of dollars.

A year ago, Graves said: "We had water from across the street to our front door. It was waist deep. There are three tri-levels that the doorways blew in. There was six feet of water and sewer backups."

Today, Graves said the committee has helped keep residents' anger in check. The committee convinced the city council that the storm's damage was widespread.

And committee members have worked with city officials, staff and consultants to figure out how to solve their historical flooding problems.

Even though work is supposed to begin this summer on \$18 million in storm drain improvements and \$5.6 million in sanitary sewer improvements this winter, residents are still a year away from living through downpours with far less worry.

"I just wish they would hurry up," Simon said. "I think next summer (for completion of storm drain improvements) is optimistic. This is a year later and here we are. I understand there are a lot of steps to the improvements. I will be happy if the city's schedule is on time."

Many of the flood-ravaged residents believe the city should have done something long ago to prevent the type of flooding that damaged at least a couple hundred homes in the two subdivisions.

BUT GRAVES believes that in the past year, city officials have come through and made good on promises. "We have gotten really good cooperation and support from the city."

Graves was keeping her fingers crossed earlier this week that a majority of residents in the two subdivisions' 1,300 homes participated in a special meeting Wednesday, June 20, in which city staff explained the impending improvements.

"We are really just putting our trust in the city and the engineers," Graves said.

And there's no doubt there will be a little pain with the gain of the much-needed improvements. Inconvenience will accompany the improvements. There will be times when residents won't be able to take a shower, do the laundry, sprinkle the lawn and flush the toilet.

"The homeowners are very willing to put up with that to get the job done," Graves said.



Westbrooke Manor subdivision resident Joann Graves, by the Minnow Pond Drain near Dunford and Bannockburn in Farmington Hills.

Hills, county officials plan for drainage improvements

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Next summer, residents in Kendallwood, Westbrooke Manor and Franklin Knolls subdivisions can expect to enjoy summer rainstorms without batten down the hatches to stop water and sewage from taking over their yards and homes.

Today, exactly one year after residents in the three subdivisions took a licking from the June 21, 1989 downpour, Farmington Hills and Oakland County Drain Commission officials are gearing up for more than \$18 million in storm drain improvements.

Another \$5 million to \$6 million will be spent improving the sanitary sewer system in the Kendallwood-Westbrook Manor, east of Farmington Road, north of 12 Mile. The improvements and repairs will prevent the bubbling, diluted sewage that filled basements and back yards a year ago.

A problem was waiting to happen when almost three inches of rain hit the subdivisions the first day of summer 1989 and poured through Commerce and West Bloomfield townships into Farmington Hills.

"There's insufficient capacity to accommodate all the flows coming downstream," said Farmington Hills engineer Gary Zorza, who is overseeing the improvements.

FROM COMMERCE and West Bloomfield, the Minnow Pond Drain runs south through Ramblewood, Colony Park and Kingspoint subdivisions before reaching Kendallwood-Westbrooke, which cannot accommodate the water flow.

Two drain courses — one from the west and one from the north — called the Minnow Pond Drain, run through Kendallwood-Westbrooke.

"It just can't handle the water. It floods into adjacent properties and continues on its way," said Farmington Hills public services director Tom Biasell.

Built in the 1950s, Kendallwood subdivision has no stormwater detention facilities. "No one at that time looked at the amount of water coming through there. So a lot of homes are built in a flood plain," Biasell said.

To fix the Kendallwood-Westbrooke problem, two things must be done. The first is to remove the excess water that runs through the Minnow Pond Drain during heavy rains. The second is to find somewhere to put the excess water.

When improved, the picturesque Minnow Pond Drain will continue to run through the subdivisions but it will handle only the subdivision's

water, not that running from Commerce and West Bloomfield.

"We still intend to leave the everyday flow," Zorza said. "The creek is a benefit and an asset. But there will be controlled overflow."

FRANKLIN KNOLLS subdivision, at 14 Mile and Middlebelt, just doesn't have an outlet for its overflowing storm water. Planned improvements will give the 150-acre subdivision an outlet to prevent future flooding.

Flooding complaints turned quickly to disgust during the 1989 flood as Kendallwood-Westbrooke homeowners saw diluted, untreated sewage accompany the water filling their basements.

"This is a problem on an even more regular basis. It happens on lesser storms. It backs up because water is getting into the pipes from different sources," Biasell said.

Water is getting into the sanitary system in Kendallwood-Westbrooke through deteriorated clay pipes. They are cracked or have leaking joints. Leaking manholes also contribute to the problem.

City staff and consultants, Hubbell, Roth & Clark of Bloomfield Hills, discovered the extent of deterioration when they sent a television camera through the sanitary pipes.

TO PREVENT seeping sewage, the amount of water entering the sanitary sewer pipes must be reduced. That will be done by replacing, relining and regrouting pipes, which will take care of about 18 percent of the 50 percent of the water that has to be removed from the sanitary system.

A majority of the water that must be reduced is getting into the system through footing drains around homes. This, too, must be alleviated and city officials are looking for homeowner cooperation. Improvements, such as downspout extensions, are expected to reduce the amount of water running into the sanitary system by another 30 percent, Biasell said.

"This will be more of an education campaign to get water away from the homes," Biasell said.



file photo

Monroe Trubley retrieves the mail on Brandywine in the Kendallwood subdivision last June.

Planned sewer improvements to cost taxpayers \$16 million

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Farmington Hills taxpayers will pay 0.6-mill for 20 years to help finance the city's \$16 million share of a total \$18 million in storm drain improvements for Kendallwood, Westbrooke Manor and Franklin Knolls subdivisions.

The storm drain improvements will be under the auspices of the Oakland County Drain Commission, which will sell bonds to finance the project. County and state road agencies will help pay for the project.

About \$5.6 million in sanitary sewer improvements will also begin for the Kendallwood-Westbrooke area. Money in the city's sewer fund will pay for these improvements. The city will administer the sanitary sewer projects.

The following projects are targeted for Kendallwood-Westbrooke subdivisions:

- Storm drain improvements: A 25-million gallon storm water detention facility will be built at 13 Mile and Farmington roads. A large pipe will intercept and redirect excess storm water from the 13 Mile and Farmington Road drain crossings to the detention facility.

- Storm drain improvements: A by-pass line will be built from the detention facility down Kendallwood Drive to tie into an existing open drain west of the parking lot at O.E. Dunckel Middle School on 13 Mile.

- Storm drain improvements: A couple small detention basins will be built. One will be north of 13 Mile, west of Farmington Road, for example. Some culverts will be built and others improved.

- Sanitary sewer improvements: In some areas, sanitary sewer lines will be excavated and replaced with new, larger sewers. This will be the most disruptive

project though it is mostly confined to the edge of streets.

- Sanitary sewer and manhole improvements: Some pipes that are not severely damaged will be regouted to fill in the cracks and joints. Some manhole repairs, including some excavation around the manhole, will be done. It also includes repairs along lines for small sections of pipe that are too severely deteriorated to be fixed with grouting. This project will be administered by the Oakland County Drain Commission under a federal grant.

- Sanitary sewer relining: In areas where the sanitary sewer has deteriorated beyond repair, the pipes will be rehabilitated with an epoxy material. In some areas where the pipe is severely deteriorated, excavation will be required to make repairs before relining. This work generally will be limited to back yards where excavation is impractical. This project will be administered by the city.

- Sanitary sewer: Homeowners will be asked to install downspout extensions on their gutters. Some also will be asked to regrade around homes to provide drainage away from homes and footing drains.

- Sanitary sewer: As part of the multi-million dollar Evergreen-Farmington sanitary sewer project, an underground detention facility will be built at Dunckel to store diluted sewage.

In the Franklin Knolls subdivision, the following work, part of the total \$18 million storm drain improvements, will be completed:

- A detention basin will be built in Glen Oaks Golf Course to provide an outlet for storm water in the subdivision. This project will take place after the golf season. Some bigger pipes are planned in the basin in addition to the work for a house with a market value of \$150,000 and an assessed value of \$75,000, 0.6-mill works out to an additional city tax of \$45 a year.

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