

Butler-Tarkington, Meridian-Kessler groups oppose city's route for last leg of flood wall

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The city has agreed to an Army Corps of Engineers plan for construction of the last section of the Northside White River flood wall, a choice that placated some residents and angered others Tuesday.

The levee will be built mostly on the eastside of the Central Canal Towpath, along Westfield Boulevard from North Capitol Avenue southwest to the Holcomb Gardens at Butler University. But the 6-foot-tall concrete berm will start west of the canal on the east bank of the White River north of the Riviera Club at Illinois Street. The levee will cross over the canal at Capitol. A lock, or floodgate, on the canal will allow water to run through the crossover.

The \$40 million Northside White River flood wall project ([see project map](#)), underway for 20 years, is intended to reduce flooding in the Northside neighborhoods of Broad Ripple, Meridian-Kessler, Butler Tarkington and Warfleigh. City officials said the flood protection will cut flood insurance costs and increase property values for homeowners

Residents of Warfleigh, where the flood wall already has been installed on the east side of the White River, applauded the route choice made by Indianapolis' Department of Public Works.

“This is a wonderful development,” said Jim Polito, who helped organized a group called Save Warfleigh to encourage the city to complete the project. “We now must be very vocal in supporting the city’s decision and the Westfield Boulevard alignment so that the project remains on track.”

The city was considering two basic routes for the last leg. The other route was on the west bank of the canal, closer to the White River. But a \$200,000 environmental study by the city concluded that the soil on that side wasn’t strong enough to support a wall. Most of the levee, running from the heart of Broad Ripple to Illinois Street, has been built.

Several neighborhood groups, including the Butler-Tarkington Neighborhood Association, the Meridian-Kessler Neighborhood Association and the Broad Ripple Village Neighborhood Association, have expressed opposition to the chosen route.

To build the nearly mile-long barrier, trees need to be cut down and vegetation cleared on Westfield. The opponents have said the levee would gather trash and destroy sight lines to the canal and its habitat, home to great blue herons, turtles and other wildlife.

Butler-Tarkington board member Dennis Faulkenberg said the flood wall's crossing the canal and the building of floodgates could be troublesome for the water supply. He also questioned whether the wall would stop the canal area from flooding.

Butler and Citizens Energy, which owns the canal and uses it as a reservoir for most of the city's drinking water, also had opposed the Westfield route.

Citizens had said the canal water supply could be threatened in a major flood if the wall was built on the east side. But the utility said Tuesday in a written statement that it now supports the route because the city had promised to build Citizens a new pumping station.

"The City has assured Citizens plans will include a new drinking water intake structure downstream of the proposed Central Canal flood gate, so over 60 percent of our community's drinking water supply is not interrupted when the canal flood gate is closed," a statement from the utility said. "Based on this assurance, Citizens fully supports Mayor Ballard's decision to move forward with the Westfield (Boulevard)."

Department of Public Works spokeswoman Jennifer Hashem said in a written statement that "currently a pumping station has been considered, but the details need to be examined."

"The station could create a secondary supply source," she said, adding that the city had no cost estimate.

Butler spokesman Michael Kaltenmark said the university would likely continue to oppose the plan because the levee would cut through Holcomb Gardens.

Neither plan would do anything for Rocky Ripple, which is between the White River and the canal near 52nd Street. The town council voted in 1996 against the levee being built on the river because it would obstruct homeowners views to the water. Years later, town leaders decided they wanted the protection, but by that time the Army Corps said it would cost too much to change the route.

Hashem said a construction timeline has not been determined. But Polito said he understood from public meetings he attended it would take three to five years to complete.

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