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When heavy rains meet aging pipes, 'Lake Glenwood' rises again

It's a mile from the nearest body of water. But a lot of the time, this Merchantville street is soggy.

By Michael Raphael
INQUIRER CORRESPONDENT

MERCHANTVILLE — They call it Lake Glenwood, and some of the residents on this tree-canopied street wear tight-lipped smiles and quip about lake-front property.

Of course, the closest real body of water — the Cooper River — is more than a mile away.

But at the intersection of Glenwood Avenue and Holly Street, lakes, rivers and streams visit about 12 times a year — every time a serious rain falls, residents said.

"The rain comes," said Ernest Vogelbacher, 76, who has weathered the water for more than three decades. "And then, it just starts. Nothing stops it."

The water runs down Glenwood from Church Road and collects in a massive puddle a couple of hundred yards in diameter. Then it sits, sometimes for days, until it slowly drips through the old drainage pipes and recedes.

In the process, it saturates front lawns and floods basements.

Almost five years ago, the borough's engineer recommended that Merchantville widen the storm-sewer pipe to 24 inches from 18. He also urged that the system of drainage pipes be replaced immediately.

Finally, that work is scheduled to begin this summer, using \$45,000 in state Department of Transportation funding. The work will be done during the day, and residents will have full access to their homes, engineers said.

The main problems are the four antiquated storm inlets that collect runoff near the intersection, and the pipes that carry the water away. The inlets are too small and the pipes were constructed of material that is now outdated.

During the two or three months of work, the four inlets will be replaced and a fifth inlet added. New pipes also will be laid.

"In our opinion, we've sized the pipe correctly," said borough engineer Edward Vernick. "We believe it's now being designed for what's there. We think we have the drainage problem solved."

Not everyone on Glenwood Avenue is convinced. At a borough council meeting a couple of weeks ago, several residents questioned a representative of Remington & Vernick Engineers. One person asked about backups in the drainage ditch into which the sewer runoff flows. Another wondered whether five inlets were enough to capture the water.

Vernick said residents had nothing to worry about.

On Glenwood Avenue last week, 84-year-old Charles Green cut his lawn across the street from the sewers. Every one of them was clogged. And although it had been days since the last rain, a small puddle sat near the intersection.

"It's had its bad years and its good years," Green said of the street he has lived on for 40 years. "But when it's bad, watch out. In the middle of the street, it gets knee-high."

Across the street, Ernest Vogelbacher searched through piles of pictures of "Lake Glenwood." He said a storm four or five years ago destroyed his daughter's car, soaking the interior.

After a particularly mean storm last year, the street flooded so badly that police had to close it.

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