

GOVERNMENT

# Merchantville attacks problem of flooding on Glenwood Ave.

By Jeremy Kaplan  
Special to The Inquirer

Merchantville's flooding problem on Glenwood Avenue started off big late last month and grew even bigger in recent weeks when borough officials discovered they probably would have to make major improvements to the drainage system in the southeast corner of the town.

The borough probably will have to spend about \$20,000 from next year's capital budget to enlarge and strengthen a drainage ditch, said Councilman Jack Hughes, who is responsible for public works in Merchantville.

The ditch, running alongside railroad tracks near the Cherry Hill border, is designed to carry runoff rainwater. But the ditch overflowed during an Oct. 23 rainstorm, with water seeping into basements and cars, and swamping Glenwood Avenue under as much as 2½ feet of water.

The borough initially blamed the flooding on debris in the ditch — felled logs, tree stumps and brush apparently cut down by Public Service Electric & Gas, and large sections of

*The problem has turned out to be more than a question of felled logs, tree stumps and other debris in a nearby drainage ditch.*

old rail, spikes and cross-ties apparently left by Amtrak workers who last spring replaced sections of the track. Although the rail is owned by Conrail, Amtrak rebuilt the track for its Atlantic City Express.

The debris clogged one set of pipes designed to conduct the stormwater north under the tracks where the main branch of the ditch changes direction; it also blocked another pipe, which carried water through an embankment where the lesser branch continues west.

Borough engineer Edward Vernick

has concluded that the debris in the ditch was almost certainly the primary cause of the Oct. 23 flooding.

Since then, a contractor for PSE&G has removed most of the tree debris, Hughes said. But those workers re-clogged some pipes when they ground the felled trees and brush into wood chips and left those in the ditch.

As Vernick investigated the problem, however, he said, he learned that even if the ditch had been clear, sewers and pipes in the system might be too small to handle the runoff.

In a report to the Borough Council, Vernick recommended that Merchantville widen the Glenwood storm-sewer pipe from 18 to 24 inches. He also urged that the system of drainage pipes be replaced immediately.

"The storm flow in the ditch at this point far exceeds the capacity of the [pipe system] under the railroad and ... through the embankment. This leads to a backwater effect in the ditch," his report stated.

Several Glenwood Avenue residents said they could have told borough officials the same thing without an  
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