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Residents get update on Cambridge flood mitigation project

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Maryland Secretary of Emergency Management Russell Strickland speaks during a presentation on the Make Cambridge Resilient Flood Mitigation project at the Cambridge branch of the Dorchester County Public Library on Aug. 21.

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CAMBRIDGE — The City of Cambridge held the first of what it says will be multiple "periodic" public meetings to share progress and get feedback on its flood mitigation project along the shore of the Choptank River.

The city's Make Cambridge Resilient Flood Mitigation Project Manager Larry White said the city will continue to reach out to the public throughout the entire design process of the project.

"This is the kickoff," he said. "There'll be other meetings where we get you up to date on what's transpired and what's come out of our studies."

The presentation, which was held at the Cambridge branch of the Dorchester County Public Library, brought many residents who had questions about how the project, which will stretch from Gerry Boyle Park at Great Marsh to the mouth of Cambridge Creek, will affect their properties and the city in general.

The plan for the project includes three main elements: a living shoreline, earth and rock embankments and stormwater management to alleviate flooding.

The city is funding the two-phase project through the grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, a grant from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the Resilient Maryland Revolving Loan Fund and city budget funds. In June, it announced that the FEMA had awarded the city $1.7 million for the first phase of the project.
The city said FEMA is also reserving $16 million for the second phase of the project. The total $17.7 million in grant money is being awarded through FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant.

During the meeting, representatives from the city, the state, the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science at Horn Point, and BayLand Consultants and Designers spoke about climate change, flooding and the project itself.
Maryland Secretary of Emergency Management Russell Strickland talked about the importance of mitigating disasters prior to them occurring. He said mitigation cuts down on the need for response and on the costs associated with recovery.
"So this would be what I would call a transformative mitigation project for the city," he said. "And it's important that it be projects like that because that will have a greater result and a greater benefit for more people."
Horn Point Lab professor Ming Li talked about sea level rise across the Chesapeake Bay and increases in flooding. He said working with nature can be better than fighting with it.
"So that's why there's a lot of interest in a lot of places all around the world to look at nature-based solutions," he said.

Megan Barniea, a BayLand senior project engineer, said no design decisions have been made yet, but the plan is to build upon those three main project elements of a living shoreline, embankments and stormwater management.
Horn Point Lab, which is supporting the project, will help to optimize the living shoreline design, assess flood risk reduction, monitor living shoreline performance and evaluate ecological co-benefits of the project.

Barniea said the project partners will be coming back to the public to get feedback on a 30% design plan. The plan, which she expects will be ready to show in early 2025, will include the footprint of proposed features, elevations and dimensions, and a construction cost estimate.
After the presentation, residents asked questions about the project, including how the project will affect private docks and public access to the waterfront.
White said the city and its partners will work with each property owner, and residents will keep access to their docks. He said there will be some public access to the living shoreline.
"I mean it can't be everywhere, but there will be access," he said.