



Eric Genrich
Mayor

Chairman Gardner, Ranking Member Baldwin, and Members: thank you so much for inviting me here today to testify before your subcommittee. Being in the first 100 days of my administration as the 42nd mayor of Green Bay, WI, I still have a lot to learn, but one thing I know for sure: we are incredibly lucky to live on the Great Lakes, the largest source of freshwater in the world. We are situated at the confluence of the Fox River, its major tributary, the East River, and the bay of Green Bay. Our drinking water comes from off the western shore of Lake Michigan, and many of our historic industries related to logistics, bulk commodities, and paper-making would not exist if not for our waterways. Finally, and importantly, the Menominee people have called Wisconsin and the Bay Area home for thousands of years and have relied on coastal wild rice beds, which are currently being restored because of their environmental and cultural value. In short, we are grateful to be a coastal community. We are proud of our heritage and we are hopeful for our future.

Like many waterfront communities, we are rediscovering the recreational and environmental value of our waterways. Ten years ago, city leaders determined to bring life back to the Fox River with the construction of our CityDeck in downtown Green Bay. Now, it's hard to imagine what our downtown would look like without this vibrant public space in the heart of our community. The city is also nearing the completion of a multi-year effort to restore a swimming beach at Bay Beach Amusement Park, which has been closed to swimmers for nearly eighty years. Based on the analysis of Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources, water quality at our beach will be in line with what is observed at other Great Lakes beaches in the state, but it's also true that we will have to close it periodically because of green-blue algal blooms. Finally, I have been working closely with our county's administration and harbor commission to develop a plan to relocate coal piles from our waterfront in downtown Green Bay to the site of a decommissioned coal-fired power plant. We hope to make room for

multiple public and private uses of varying types in this location, while constructing a 21st century commercial port at the mouth of the bay on the site of the former power plant.

That is all to say that we, like many waterfront communities, have recognized and made strides to rectify our historically dysfunctional relationship with our greatest natural resource. We are actively seeking to develop our waterfronts in environmentally appropriate and economically productive ways. Significant challenges remain, however. Lake Michigan and the Bay of Green Bay are plagued with invasive species; there is a dead zone in the bay that is the result of significant phosphorus runoff and is threatening one of the greatest fisheries in the world; and our waterfront areas have suffered from coastal erosion and flooding.

With regard to flooding, 13% of the city's parcel's are located within the boundaries of our 100-year floodplain. This spring our East River topped its banks and flooded scores of residents in the floodplain on the east and west sides of the East River. Late last summer an extreme rain event caused significant flooding on our city's east side. And just this past weekend we experienced more flooding in low-lying areas of Green Bay caused by torrential downpours.

Great Lakes levels remain historically high in the case of most lakes, and Lakes Michigan and Huron were just one inch shy of the June record. These high water levels have caused us to lift and fix our docks at the metro boat launch and led to the cancellation of our full marathon this spring because of flooding on our Fox River Trail. In the context of what other communities have faced, our problems might seem small, but it is clear that they are not going away. If it's not high water levels, it will be extreme weather events that impact cities like Green Bay all across the country. Heavy rainfall, in particular, has been a major problem for Wisconsin communities in recent times, and according to the research of Dr. David Liebl of UW-Madison, the number of rainfalls producing more than 5" of rain almost doubled in frequency between

the years 2001-2014 compared to 1950-1975, occurring 3.1 times per year during the more recent period. On August 28, 2018, we experienced 2.6” of rain in just two and a half hours with 6.5” of rain falling in some parts of Green Bay in a twenty-four hour period.¹

To recap our recent history, we have experienced multiple localized flooding events and a sizable riverine flooding event in the past year, and we have no reason to expect these events to become less likely. President Trump’s Environmental Protection Agency tells us the opposite, in fact. From the EPA website:

Heavy downpours have increased in frequency and intensity worldwide in the last 50 years. They are expected to become more frequent and intense as global temperatures continue to rise. As a result, the risk of flooding is likely to increase dramatically across the United States. The average 100-year floodplain is projected to increase 45 percent by the year 2100...²

Looking back a bit further, our two largest floods in the last fifty years occurred in 1973 and 1990. On April 9, 1973 the city of Green Bay experienced a 500-year event when extremely high lake levels and winds out of the northeast caused massive flooding throughout much of the city with 4 feet of water in our downtown and millions of dollars in property damage.³ A June 1990 flood also caused over \$11 million dollars in damages to area properties, having impacted over 200 homes and businesses when the East River topped its banks because of a 4.9 inch rain event.⁴

¹ Bachhuber, Jim. 2018. “Managing the (not so) rare rainstorms”. *The Municipality*. 113 (12).

² “Green Infrastructure: Manage Flood Risk”. EPA.gov. <https://www.epa.gov/green-infrastructure/manage-flood-risk>. (Accessed July 16, 2019).

³ “Nor’Easter Coastal Storm Flooding on Green Bay”. GreatLakesResilience.org. <http://greatlakesresilience.org/stories/wisconsin/nor%E2%80%99easter-coastal-storm-flooding-green-bay-0> (Accessed July 16, 2019).

⁴ Liebl, David S. “Mitigating Flood Risk in the East River”. WisconsinAcademy.org. <https://www.wisconsinacademy.org/blog/waters-wisconsin/mitigating-flood-risk-east-river> (Accessed July 16, 2019).

Green Bay is a coastal community, and it is an old city. As a result, there are many areas that are low-lying and were once wetlands. Over the years, springs and swamps have been filled and creeks have been forced underground. During periods of high water or significant rain events, nature finds a way into the homes and businesses of area residents. This is detrimental to the lives and livelihoods of our citizens, and it is costly for taxpayers, and we as elected officials must be committed to finding a long-term solution to this national and global problem that empowers local communities to act. Since being elected in April I have convened two meetings of significance on this topic: one with affected area residents and one with flood management experts. We are also engaged in the process of applying for a grant to perform an audit of the city's codes and ordinances to make sure it is conducive to the development of necessary green infrastructure elements. And we are reviewing our county's FEMA-required Hazard Mitigation Plan to ensure it recognizes and prioritizes all available strategies for flood mitigation.

Moving forward, we will be thoroughly assessing our flood risks, evaluating traditional and green infrastructure options, constructing physical solutions, and potentially relocating residents from vulnerable areas. And when I say "we" I mean the City of Green Bay, our government and our residents, but I hope it soon means all the governments and residents of the lower Fox and lower East River watersheds. Water, like other things, rolls downhill, and we are at the bottom. Although we are the largest municipality in the region, we don't have the resources or the tools to solve these issues on our own. Floodwaters don't care about municipal boundaries, and neither can we. As Julia Noordyk from the University of Wisconsin Sea Grant has stated, "Our outdated and aging infrastructure was not designed for the quantity of runoff that our city is now experiencing due to more frequent and intense storm events and loss of water storage capacity in the upper reaches of the watershed. A large-scale regional approach is needed if we are to address these issues."

So what am I asking of you? Help, of course. Money, undoubtedly. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has been incredibly successful and popular. I ask for your continued support of this program. The identified GLRI goals of making Great Lakes water safe for recreation, delisting all Areas of Concern, and eliminating nuisance algal blooms all overlap with our needs and the needs of many coastal communities. In addition, the FEMA Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program, the Army Corps of Engineers Silver Jackets, and the NOAA Coastal Resilience Grant Program are all relevant to our needs. We ask that you continue to support these initiatives.

More than those requests, though, I am asking for you to muster the political will to do what is called for in response to an obvious and growing threat to communities all across this country. Just last week our nation celebrated the 50th anniversary of our moon-landing. I am not the first, and I won't be the last, to urge you to recapture the political imagination that allowed us to think big and act boldly at that time, and I am begging you to take that charge seriously. Temperatures and water levels are rising and our weather is becoming identifiably more extreme. Whatever the cause, we have no alternative but to commit ourselves to investing in the infrastructure and enacting the policies to build resilient communities across this country.

Green Bay is an exceptional city, in a great state, in an indispensable nation. With apologies to Senator Cruz, we are home to America's Team. Green Bay is by far the smallest NFL city and the only one with a franchise that is community-owned. We are the little community "that could" in the past and "that will" into the future. My bosses, Green Bay's citizens, know that we are capable of great things as a city, and they are ready to meet the challenges we face head-on. So please lead. Lead us boldly, lead us optimistically, lead us scientifically. We will follow.

Thank you again Chairman Gardner, Ranking Member Baldwin, and members. It is a true privilege to be with you today. I am happy to answer questions.