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Fishkill, East Fishkill, Wappingers Falls, Town of Wappinger, Town and City of Poughkeepsie

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## Frustration mounts for Whaley Lake residents over damaged bridge from Ida



*On September 2, 2021, the huge volume of water from the remnants of Hurricane Ida completely washed out the Lakeview Drive Bridge and road at Whaley Lake in the Town of Pawling, Holmes. Despite desperate efforts for help for nine months since, there is still no bridge or road at this site.*

*-Courtesy photo*

### By Rich Thomaselli

Frustration is mounting for a group of homeowners who live near the damaged Whaley Lake Bridge in Holmes, as time – and options – to repair the structure is running out.

The bridge, road and access on Lakeview Drive leading to the lake were all damaged last September when the remnants of Hurricane Ida reached the area and caused havoc.

But more than nine months later, the non-profit Shore Haven Civic Association – a group spun off from the

103-member Homeowner's Association in Whaley Lake – has run into roadblock after roadblock from the federal level to the state to the county trying to secure help for repairs.

That includes the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Small Business Association (SBA).

"They're using us like a chip at a poker table," said Aaron Cioppa, acting president of the Homeowners Association. "It's been the most frustrating thing in the world."

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## Celebrate businesses in Village of Wappingers Falls at Festival at the Falls



*Wappingers Falls Business & Professional Association members, Cindy Latino, left, and Rose Haines, hang the banner announcing the annual Festival at the Falls in the Village of Wappingers Falls on June 11 from noon to 6 p.m. in Mesier Park.*

*-Photo by Kristine Coulter*

### By Kristine Coulter

Learn about local businesses and the opportunities for businesses during the annual Wappingers Falls Business & Professional Association's (WFBPA) Festival at the Falls on Saturday, June 11 from noon to 6 p.m. (rain date June 12).

Attendees can visit vendors in Mesier Park in the Village of Wappingers Falls during the Festival.

"We're excited about the festival. It will be nice to get out," said Cindy Latino, president of the Wappingers Falls Business & Professional Association. She

noted Mesier Park "is a showcase" and "very few other municipalities can outdo us with the park."

There will be approximately two dozen vendors. Six food trucks will be in attendance during the annual event, said Latino.

"I think our tagline – Come on Down to the Village – really tries to encourage all the people to come," remarked Latino.

Rose Haines, the secretary for the WFBPA, said, "It's a great day." She mentioned that "the food trucks are fabulous."

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# No solution to Ida damage

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Now it appears the only avenue for the Association is to raise the \$50,000-plus on its own through a GoFundMe page. So far, the group has received \$8,400 in donations. Visit <https://gofund.me/3fca1867fund.me>

"Dealing with the government has been a nightmare," said another resident, Marilyn Bontempo.

Runoff water from the heavy storms dumped by Ida not only caused massive property flooding, but wiped out the bridge. The Association says that everything from delivery trucks to ambulances, fire and police responders are forced to turn away or try to navigate a tenuous situation caused by the damage.

Indeed, a timeline provided by Bontempo lays out in black and white just how frustrating the process has been.

Met with Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro, Town of Pawling Supervisor James Schmitt and New York State Senator Sue Serino at the Whaley Lake Bridge site on Sept. 2, 2021, just days after the damage. The County could not help.

"That bridge is actually privately owned, so the County's ability to assist is very limited," a spokesperson for the County Executive's office said in a statement provided last week to the Northern and Southern Dutchess News. "Our Department of Emergency Response did very actively advocate for FEMA assistance (either public assistance or individual assistance) and brought the FEMA review teams to the site on multiple occasions. It was determined it would not be eligible for FEMA public assistance and FEMA was working with the Homeowner's Association about the possibility of Individual Assistance."

Per Schmitt's suggestion, 24 residents filed for FEMA help on Nov. 23, 2021. It would be the first of two times the federal agency denied the Association's application, despite letters from the local U.S. Postal Service, police, fire and first responders regarding the danger that the damaged bridge presented. FEMA said homeowners could still access their homes without the bridge.

"Yes, there are two access points. Depending on which side of the bridge you live, you can access your home and that's why FEMA will not pay attention to us," Bontempo said. "We put signs up saying that the bridge is out, but people still come down the road and have to back out. Even Royal Carting (garbage removal) has to now back down the road. It's a dangerous situation."

Schmitt, who did tell the Association he would waive permit fees if the group was able to find the funds to fix the bridge, did not return a request for comment.

Then-HOA president Wendel Weber applied for an SBA loan also on Nov. 23. It was denied because the applicants did not show an ability to pay the loan back.

In late December, the main water line was insulated by adding an additional outer pipe, insulation and covered with Item 4 to prevent freezing as a stop-gap measure.

In February of this year, an application to Engineers without Borders was not selected. The Association also explored



*The absence of the bridge on Lakeview Drive near Whaley Lake has presented major obstacles for traffic and walkers for nine months, necessitating many large vehicles to turn around or to back down the road. For emergency responders, this leaves the entire community at risk in the event of failing to reach destinations on time.*

-Courtesy photo

local College Civil Engineering Programs for Community Outreach, but was told that their focus is on nonprofit parks and arts organizations.

In May of this year, the Shore Haven Beach Path leading to the lake received in-kind services of five truckloads of fill and labor/equipment from one contractor as a start to improving safety.

The group has appealed to Dutchess County Legislator Edward Hauser, who pledged help in an email to Bontempo and Weber.

The Association also asked Schmitt to help with a grant, but the April email appeared to be too late for the May deadline.

"We have been working as hard as possible to assist in the grant for your bridge over the last 2 weeks. This grant is extremely involved and requires a lot of very involved, high-level work and expertise. As such, we reached out to our grant company for assistance and unfortunately they are unable to complete it in this short time frame. They also reached out to subcontractors they work with and who are unable to assist as well. We can-

not complete the grant ourselves due to the rigorous work involved - we don't have the time or staff to get it done before the May 4th deadline," Schmitt replied to Bontempo's husband, Richard Wilson. "As you know, we've reached out and advocated on your behalf to FEMA, the SBA, Dutchess County and Homeland Security (DHSES) many times and have tried everything to assist in fixing the bridge, and they again confirmed that this project is not an ideal candidate for funding through this grant. At this point, unfortunately, we've reached another dead end. We will continue to keep an eye out for any possible means of funding the bridge construction and apologize that this process has been so disappointing."

It now appears the Homeowners Association is getting closer to the end game.

"We're already there," said Giovanna Cioppa, Aaron's wife, who is on the Association's Bridge Committee. "It's frustrating and disappointing, especially when all of us are taxpayers and you would think that taxpayers would get a reasonable amount of help in return."

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