

Study seeks answers on flooding

Army Corps aims to help shield Daytona from storm surges

Eileen Zaffiro-Kean
Daytona Beach News-Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

DAYTONA BEACH — Not long into an update on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood risk management study that began in January 2024, city commissioners were smacked with a blunt assessment.

“If we construct a project, we’re never going to eliminate flooding in the region,” Jim LaGrone, a project manager with the Army Corp’s Jacksonville District, told commissioners at their Dec. 17 meeting. “It’s near impossible.”

The in-depth study is searching for ways to reduce flooding as much as possible, especially the type of emergency flooding that inundates roads and pushes a few feet of water into residents’ homes.

But the topography of the area, and the way drainage systems were set up in Volusia County over the past century, makes it extremely difficult and expensive to protect the urban core areas of Daytona Beach that have repeatedly been devastated by major flooding, LaGrone explained.

The Army Corps study team is still working to find solutions, and has come up with a list of things that could help. That could include raising the Nova Canal berm to crossroads elevations, channel improvements made in conjunction with backflow prevention, and buyouts of properties with the most expensive damage.

The Corps is also looking into building three large gates on the western banks of the Halifax River where the 11th Street Canal in Holly Hill, Reed Canal in South Daytona and Halifax Canal in Port Orange each feed into the river.

During high tides, incoming water prevents drainage of upland areas and sometimes even reverses the flow of the canals.

The gates could be opened at low tide so the water could drain away from the watershed. That would add rainwater storage capacity to the region. Then as major storms or high tides approached, the gates could be closed, creating three reservoirs for pumped out water to collect.

What’s the Army Corps study focusing on?

The flood risk management feasibility study is being led by a group of engineers, biologists, geologists, hydrologists, surveyors, archaeologists, economists, planners, real estate specialists and an environmental justice coordinator. Daytona Beach’s Utilities Department is also helping the Army Corps employees based in Jacksonville, Savannah and Mobile.

The study area is bordered by Nova Road, Orange Avenue, Ridgewood Avenue and Beville Road. The low-lying, bowl-shaped topography of the area has made the southern end of the Midtown neighborhood and the Fairway Estates neighborhood vulnerable to water rising as high as three or four feet during especially heavy rainstorms and tropical storms.



Floodwaters cover a street in Daytona Beach’s Campbell Park neighborhood on Oct. 10, 2024, after Hurricane Milton. PROVIDED BY LAURIE AMALBERT



The Midtown neighborhood was flooded yet again as Hurricane Milton swept through Daytona Beach in October of 2024. DAVID TUCKER/NEWS-JOURNAL

The two neighborhoods are on a low point between Clyde Morris Boulevard and Ridgewood Avenue, and they sit low relative to the Halifax River.

The area drains to the Nova Canal and then the Halifax River, but that drainage system doesn’t work during large rainfall events when the river is high and blocks water trying to flow out of pipes and into the Halifax. The result is water settling in low-lying areas adjacent to the canal.

“The city has spent \$8 million to \$10 million on infrastructure to remove water, but when the water is so high and pipes are fully submerged, there is nowhere for the water to go,” LaGrone said.

The hope is that the study will convince Congress to approve and help pay for a project that could greatly alleviate the catastrophic flooding the Midtown

and Fairway Estates neighborhoods have suffered again and again. If Congress agrees to help, the federal government would probably pick up 65% of the costs, and the city would have to come up with the remaining 35%.

The team of engineers looking for solutions to Daytona’s urban core flooding was originally going to complete a tentatively selected plan in June. By this month, the Army Corps was going to endorse a recommended plan for flood mitigation, and in June of 2026, the plan was going to enter state and agency review.

But there have been delays, which means the U.S. Army Corps has another 18 months to complete its final report and recommend a specific project for congressional authorization. It appears now the earliest Congress could

approve funding a flood-reduction project would be late 2027, and actual work likely wouldn’t start until 2028 or 2029.

What happens next with the Daytona flood study?

The study has looked at 18 different alternatives, including doing nothing and leaving things as they are. They’ve eliminated most of those alternatives now.

The team has ruled out creating dry and wet reservoirs as too expensive and ineffective. They had looked at using the city’s municipal golf course for water storage, but that could cost \$100 million to \$200 million. The Daytona Beach airport has open land, but water reservoirs would attract birds, which would be dangerous for planes in that area.

They decided underground water storage would be prohibitively expensive and ineffective given the area’s high water table.

They’ve also looked at creating levees, floodwalls, new canals, berms and a flood warning system. All those ideas were determined to be too expensive, ineffective or both.

The Army Corps team studied how Daytona Beach floods by watching what happened during and after Hurricane Milton in October 2024.

“We finally understand it, and we’ve come up with measures,” LaGrone said.

He showed city commissioners maps depicting where the lowest-lying areas are in the city, including one that had a myriad of little dots to show where each home is located.

LaGrone said he doesn’t have preliminary recommendations yet, but he’ll come before city commissioners again in February with more updates. There will also be a meeting for the public next year, he said.

You can reach Eileen at Eileen.Zaffiro@news-jrnl.com

NOTICE OF CANCELLATION OF CERTIFICATION HEARING ON PROPOSED ELECTRICAL TRANSMISSION LINE CORRIDOR

The certification hearing, Application No. TA25-20 (OGC No. 25-1510), Division of Administrative Hearings No. 25-004655TL, originally scheduled to begin January 12, 2026, has been cancelled. In accordance with the Florida Electrical Transmission Line Siting Act, Section 403.527(6), F.S., on December 16, 2025, all parties to this proceeding stipulated that there are no disputed issues of material fact or law in this matter. Accordingly, on December 16, 2025, the administrative law judge issued an order granting a request to cancel the hearing and relinquish jurisdiction to the Department of Environmental Protection.

Pursuant to Section 403.529(1)(a), F.S., the Department of Environmental Protection will issue a final order within 40 days of the Administrative Law Judge’s order.