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On the surface, Monday night's Board of Selectmen meeting was dominated by a protracted discussion about the growing menace of flooding in Darien.

But underneath that, swirled strong undercurrents of accusations, embarrassing disclosures, pent-up disappointment and anger over whether or not the five-member board would fund a study to look into the pressing matter.

Over the past three years, the town's Environmental Protection Commission has received a deluge of reports about inundated basements and swamped lawns from residents living along the banks of the Stony Brook River.

"We have been presented with neighborhood complaints and photographic evidence of the increased flooding activity. We also have eyewitness accounts from our commissioners who have inspected some of the homes (affected by the flooding)," EPC Chairman Peter Hillman said.

Driven by the desire to tackle the problem that had been plaguing so many community members, the EPC decided to bring it to the attention of the Board of Selectmen.

In a Dec. 11, 2006, letter to the board, Hillman wrote, "Our commission proposes the town to initiate an engineering study by an independent, outside firm to attempt to identify the cause or causes of the increase in frequency and intensity along (the river)."

Countering Hillman's plea, Robert Steeger, director of the Department of Public Works, said at Monday's meeting, "It is not clear to me what additional information we will gain from a new study."

In light of the fact that the EPC is a body of limited powers with no funds of its own, Hillman also requested the board to "initiate the authorization of funding from the Board of Finance" so that a study could be undertaken.

"We are just a reactive agency with no money of our own. We are only empowered to review applications for permits on a case-by-case basis," he said.

Hillman alleges that the request fell on deaf ears, however.

Reacting to that, First Selectwoman Evonne Klein said, "Yes, I did receive the letter. But what I was taken aback by was that the focus of the discussion was the timeline of the receipt of the letter(s) rather than the steps that we need to take to address the problem of flooding."

Between the time that the letter was sent out and Jan. 31, the commission received no response from the board.

"I had nothing from them (board members) during this time," Hillman said, "and folks to whom I had given copies of this letter began inquiring about the level of progress (on this front)."

"On Jan. 31, I had a meeting with the first selectwoman on an unrelated matter," Hillman said. "At the end of that meeting, I asked her privately if she'd had a chance to respond. She said that she had looked at it and that she had sent it to Robert Steeger."

Klein said this was the "first time in three-and-a-half years that a complaint had been received from anyone for not being on the board agenda fast enough."

Despite the assurance, Hillman did not hear back from either Klein or Steeger.

A week later, on Feb. 7, when Selectmen Paul Hendrickson approached the EPC to discuss a matter related to his personal property, Hillman said he took the opportunity to apprise him of his "frustration" at the "lack of movement" at the board's end.

"We dealt with his application and just when we were done, I said to him, 'Hey Paul, just a minute, before you go I have an extra copy of the (Dec. 11) letter,'" he said.

While the Board of Selectmen continued to maintain its silence, on March 2, Darien got hit by a powerful storm that dumped 3

to 5 inches of rain over a space of four hours and caused several homes to be evacuated.

Hoping to elicit a response from the board, Hillman shot off another letter to Klein on March 5.

Reiterating the commission's vexation, he wrote "To date, the EPC has heard nothing from the responsible town officials regarding our urgent request for funding of a prompt study We call upon the appropriate town officials to take any necessary actions to ensure that the impending budget includes funds for (the study) and that any recommended remedial measures occur as expeditiously as possible."

On March 6, Klein called Hillman to tell him that he was still on the board's radar and that he should not feel ignored.

Hillman told the Darien News-Review, "I think the first selectwoman, (town Administrative Officer John) Crary and Mr. Steeger buried them."

That the letters had not been received by some of the board members came as a shock to Selectwoman Linda Santarella.

"We were not aware that such a request had been made to the board," she said at Monday's meeting.

But Klein said, "The letter was included in the Dec. 18, 2006, Board of Selectmen packet for review and consideration."

"As elected officials, it is our responsibility to respond as quickly as we can to requests made to us, regardless of whether we are in the middle of holidays or a budget session. I am a firm believer that any document that is sent to the Board of Selectmen should be copied to every board member, " Klein said Tuesday.

Further, she said that she has found out that such a request had been made by doing her own research and reviewing the minutes of the regular meeting of the EPC held on Dec. 6, 2006.

Asked why the letters did not reach the other board members, Santarella said, "You reach your own conclusion."

Emphasizing the need address the issue at hand, Klein said, "We need to keep the eye on the ball and collect relevant information -- be they come from the EPC or DPW -- about the flooding."

Giving an indication of the next logical step, Klein said the board would first deliberate whether to fund a new study and secondly, on the nature of the study.

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