Second '1,000-year' flood hits historic Md. city in Howard County

By MARY ANN BARTON   May. 29, 2018

Cars stack up in the aftermath of a catastrophic flood in Ellicott City, Md. less than two years after another devastating flood hit the historic city in Howard County, Md. Photo courtesy of Howard County, Md.

Howard County, Md. suffers its second "1,000-year flood"in two years following eight inches of rain in two hours. County assisted 300, including 30 water rescues

Howard County, Md. suffered severe flash flooding Sunday, May 27, Memorial Day weekend, on the same scale as July 30, 2016. More than 8 inches of rain fell on the area — an amount equal to "two months of rain in two hours," according to AccuWeather. Video posted on social media showed cars in the county seat of Ellicott City careening down Main Street, being swept away by a wall of ravaging floodwaters. Howard County first responders located the body of a missing man in the Patapsco River Tuesday. He was last seen at the height of the flooding on Main Street trying to assist a woman rescue her pet.

"It's devastating for all of us, it's a difficult scene down there," Howard County Executive Allan Kittleman said May 28 during a news conference. Local business owners, he noted "have gone through hell to get where they are today. We told them we're there for them in any way possible."

Kittleman and Gov. Larry Hogan (R) declared the county under a state of emergency and held their first news conference after dark the same day of the flood.

The county assisted about 300 residents May 27 and about 30 of those were water rescues, County Fire Chief John Butler said. The county's 911 center fielded more than 1,100 phone calls during a six-hour window.

Local businesses were just getting back on their feet after the flood that hit two years ago; most of the businesses had returned and the area saw 20 new businesses open.

"My heart breaks for them," Kittleman said. "They are going to have to make a tough decision. I will support whatever decision they make."

Kittleman's news conferences were aired live on the county's Facebook page and archived there; the press conference May 28 saw 12,000 views and received nearly 300 comments. The county is also getting the word out via its Twitter channel.

The county also set up a special page on its website with continuous updates with information on how to volunteer, a hotline phone number and where people could find cars swept away by the flood currents. Information was also available on storm debris removal, counseling for residents and a disaster assistance center that was opened.

The city fenced off the Main Street area devastated by the flooding and created a credentialing process for those who needed to gain access to the area. Anyone who needed to get into a building had to show valid ID and be escorted to and from the area. The city was assisted by Howard County and Maryland State Police in that effort.

For those wanting to make donations, the county is sending people to the Community Foundation of Howard County website.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency had awarded the county $1 million last month for flood mitigation efforts following the flooding from 2016 that left two people dead. The funds, from FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, were expected to be used, along with $400,000 from the county, to improve a culvert in a residential area on Ellicott City's west end. FEMA also provided more than $5 million in public assistance grant funding.

About Mary Ann Barton (Full Bio)

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Mary Ann Barton is a senior staff writer for County News and is returning to NACo after previously working at the association. She comes to NACo after covering local news for Patch.com in Northern Virginia.

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