Jonathan Erbe

11/4/18

CA 260

Advocacy Speech FINAL

Building for Madison’s Soggy Future

Anyone who lived in Madison last summer knows that it was a great season, minus one *big* reality check from nature on the night of August 20th. Once it was over, the storm’s might was apparent: “…record-breaking rainfall dumped 11 inches on Mazomanie. The west side of Madison was hit with 9 inches. Over 15 inches pummeled Cross Plains — the most rain to fall in a 24-hour period in state history” (4). That last line is correct, this storm was a record-breaker… and it hints to a future of similar, or worse floods. According to Daniel Wright, an assistant professor at UW-Madison’s engineering school who studies rainfall and climate data to predict flood risk, “If you look at the observations of rainfall — which in this country go back a century, if not more — it’s clear in the Midwest that the frequency and intensity of these heavy rainfall events are going up” (4). A local, Jacob Bicknase, relives his family’s struggle in the storm: “For that first hour, I was just trying to get whatever I could out of the water. But it wasn’t very long before we realized that the water was still rising… We didn’t know if the water would keep rising or to what extent the final damage would be,” says Bicknase. “Right before we got on the boat [to escape their flooded home], the water was up to my waist outside. You could feel a current going by that was pulling towards lower ground. It was dangerous” (4) When nature displaces people from their homes, what can be done? In addition to natural displacement, there’s a rising homeless rate, “… a 4% increase from last January, when 777 people were counted… The number of homeless people has grown as well from last July, when 792 people were counted without homes… including 217 children” (2). These figures are taken from a study in 2015, if taken at the 4% rate, the number should be around 824 today, nearly a third being young kids. Children are arguably the most vulnerable demographic in society, and when faced with record-setting floods *unsheltered*, tragic images come to mind… Clearly, Madison needs a solution to these increasingly-intense storms and homelessness. Plans for 5 projects are already being discussed but carry big price tags to be paid for by tax-payers: “…at 601 Bay View… an estimated $29 million… 1814 Packers Ave… estimated to cost $15 million… 5614 Schroeder Road… $20.6 million project… 4602 Cottage Grove Road… an estimated $16 million… 1314-1326 E. Washington Ave… estimated to cost $14.8 million” (3). After these projects would be said-and-done, tax-payers will hold a $95.4 million bill. There’s a much simpler, more personal solution that utilizes free volunteers: Habitat for Humanity (HfH). Speaking from my experience with them throughout Southeastern Wisconsin, volunteering for HfH is immensely satisfying and humbling, while serving the downtrodden in local communities. Whether you’ve used nail guns to secure a home’s frame or are picking up a hammer for the first time, HfH is made up of friendly, patient, and experienced personnel that’ll aim you to tailor-made, productive tasks. There are no words to describe the feeling after committing a lot of time and effort into a home to see the family’s faces upon seeing the completed project. Now, more than ever, the city of Madison and Dane County need affordable housing and the ability to recover from increasingly intense floods. Everyone needs food, water, and shelter to survive, yet the homeless (including an unsettling number of children) are the poorest-equipped. It’ll take projects like Habitat for Humanity and able-bodied volunteers to combat these problems. Summer is coming, and with it, another set of powerful, damaging storms: you can either feel sad as you watch families trudge through flood-waters on TV or feel a call to help your local community by joining the much-needed volunteers of Habitat for Humanity.

**Bibliography**

1. Habitat for Humanity of Dane County. (n.d.). Retrieved October 30, 2018, from https://habitatdane.org/
2. Tarr, J. (2015, March 03). Survey shows Madison's homeless population continues to grow. Retrieved October 30, 2018, from https://isthmus.com/news/news/survey-shows-madisons-homeless-population-continues-to-grow/
3. Capital Times. (2018, August 25). Madison considers five affordable housing proposals for city funding. Retrieved October 30, 2018, from <https://madison.com/ct/news/local/neighborhoods/madison-considers-five-affordable-housing-proposals-for-city-funding/article_8e330b4e-eace-58d4-ba27-0cb442eaaff0.html>
4. Brogan, D. (2018, August 30). Swamped. Retrieved October 30, 2018, from <https://isthmus.com/news/cover-story/swamped/>

Word Count: 645