Miami Conservancy District

Benefit Assessment Study

Advisory Committee Meeting #3 – May 20, 2025

Summary & Insights

Overall Project Purpose: MCD is reviewing and updating the method for appraising flood protection benefits and the assessments based on that appraisal.

The Miami Conservancy District (MCD), with support from Stantec and facilitation by the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission (MVRPC), is updating how it appraises and assigns flood protection benefits and costs across the region. This work supports the 7th Readjustment of the Appraisal of Benefits—a critical process that determines how MCD funds the upkeep of its 100+ year-old flood protection system.

Project Purpose
To explore and refine how benefits are calculated, and costs are distributed across the nine-county service area—balancing equity, transparency, and long-term sustainability.

What Happened at Meeting #3
Advisory Committee members reviewed and evaluated four alternative approaches for assessing flood protection benefits and funding needs. Their input was gathered through group discussions, written worksheets, and anonymous ratings. The aim was to explore what feels fair and equitable while balancing financial realities and regional impacts.

The advisory committee reviewed:

- Four potential alternatives for appraising benefits.
- Summaries of public opinion research.
- Feedback from previous meetings.

Committee members discussed practical, political, and philosophical concerns about fairness, cost, public perception, and how to effectively communicate any proposed changes.

Overview of the Alternatives

1. **Alternative 1: Stormwater Contribution (based on impervious surface area – ERUs)**
2. **Alternative 2: 4 Protection Zones (based on proximity to flood protection)**
3. **Alternative 3: 7 Protection Zones (more nuanced version of Alternative 2)**
4. **Alternative 4: Simplified Current Method (tweaks to the existing structure)**

What Participants Liked

- **Equity & Fairness**: Many favored spreading costs more broadly (Alternative 1) or charging more to those who directly benefit (Alternatives 2 & 3).
- **Clarity**: Simpler alternatives (1 and 4) were easier to understand and communicate.

- **Direct-Indirect Balance**: Proposals that reflected both direct and indirect flood protection benefits were seen as more equitable.
- **Flexibility**: Participants appreciated the potential to blend strong elements from different proposals (e.g., mixing ERUs with protection zones).

Main Concerns

- **Complexity**: Alternatives 2 and 3 were seen as more equitable, but harder to explain to the public.
- **"New Payers" Issue**: Alternatives that bring in previously non-assessed counties/property owners (especially Preble & Shelby) raised concerns about fairness and political feasibility.
- **Government Impact**: High cost burden on local governments—especially under Alternatives 3 and 4—was flagged as a serious concern.
- **Education Gap**: Committee members consistently emphasized the need for a strong public education campaign for any alternative.

Key Takeaways

1. More Data Needed

Members want clearer numbers to understand the real-world impact of each proposal:

- How would costs change for property owners, local governments, and landowners?
- How do proposed assessments compare to past years?

2. Equity is Critical

There's strong support for aligning payments with actual benefits received, especially between those near protected areas vs. those farther away:

- Simpler models are easier to explain but may feel unfair.
- More detailed models feel fairer but are harder to communicate.

3. Political and Public Buy-In is a Challenge

Committee members are concerned about how increased assessments will be perceived:

- New or higher costs are politically sensitive.
- Public understanding of the Conservancy District and its funding is low.
- There's skepticism in counties that haven't historically paid.

4. Messaging Matters

Clear, relatable messaging is essential. Suggestions included:

- Showing real-life consequences if funding fails.
- Highlighting return on investment and community safety.
- Using visuals that show local benefits, not just charts and data.

5. No Perfect Alternative—Each Has Trade-offs

- **There is no perfect solution**: Each alternative has trade-offs between fairness, simplicity, and financial sustainability.
- **A blended approach may be best**: Combining equitable cost sharing (Alt 2/3) with clear, familiar metrics (ERUs from Alt 1) received strong support.

- **Education is essential**: Success depends on a transparent, region-wide effort to help people understand who pays, who benefits, and why.

Alternative	Pros	Cons
Alt 1: Broad (Stormwater-style)	**Easy to understand, broad cost sharing**	**Doesn't reflect direct benefits, hard to justify for outer counties**
Alt 2: 4 Zones (Risk-Based)	**Most fair in aligning cost with risk**	**Politically difficult, needs strong public education**
Alt 3: 7 Zones (Granular)	**Most precise, potentially most equitable**	**Complex, hard to communicate, may not ease high assessments**
Alt 4: Current Model	**Familiar, less disruption**	**Doesn't address known inequities or funding needs**

Suggested Refinements

Participants shared ideas for improving each alternative:

- Add tiers to better reflect levels of benefit (especially for direct vs. indirect).
- Use ERUs with multipliers based on location or property value.
- Clarify cost impacts on counties and high-paying properties.
- Recognize agricultural landowners' investments in water management.
- Flatten steep cost curves to avoid burdening a few stakeholders.

Conclusion

- The Advisory Committee's feedback underscores the need for a thoughtful, transparent, and well-communicated update to the benefits appraisal process. While no single solution is perfect, participants emphasized the importance of fairness, public understanding, and maintaining the integrity of MCD's essential flood protection services.
- The committee's input, alongside public opinion data, will help shape MCD's proposed changes and ensure regional voices are heard before decisions are finalized.