

Water concerns flooding Columbia officials

 www.republictimes.net/water-concerns-flooding-columbia-officials/

November 19, 2025



Pictured is a screenshot of drone footage showing flooding in Columbia's Joy View Acres Subdivision in 2021. Runoff is being collected from the Burroughs Road Subdivision to the north and being diverted into Joy View Acres via a set of drain pipes, circled at center, which have been one source of repeated frustration for subdivision residents.

There's water, water everywhere in Columbia, but several residents are claiming city officials have left them high and dry.

During the Nov. 3 city council meeting, three individuals spoke about drainage issues in their respective neighborhoods, with all three decrying the lack of city response.

Two speakers spoke about drainage issues on North Briegel Street.

The first to speak was John Garrison, who cited issues near his home in the 600 block of North Briegel Street.

Garrison claimed there is severe damage to his property due to water retention near his home which he claims has been mostly ignored since he first brought it to the city's attention in 2012.

Garrison told the *Republic-Times* he contacted the city about a faulty drain near his home 13 years, but the city responded by stating it had no record of the drain's existence.

Following a city inspection on the drain, Columbia Department of Public Works personnel were instructed to fill this drain with "limestone gravel," Garrison said.

He continued to seek resolution of the issue since then with few tangible results.

Garrison did report that Columbia Director of Public Works Mike Sander came out this spring to observe flooding in the area of 611 and 613 N. Briegel.

The drain was marked for repair in June, and the city notified Garrison of plans to fix the drain last week.

However, when nobody showed up on Nov. 12, Garrison contacted the city only to be told the project had been put on hold due to leaf collection efforts.

The house at 611 N. Briegel was built more than 100 years ago, and Garrison said there is not a single crack in the structure's foundation.

The constant presence of water on the property, though, is likely to cost him an expensive repair process.

Garrison said he expects excavation will be required on one side of the house, and it will likely need to be "mudjacked" – a process to raise his now-sinking foundation.

"You can see where the soil is on the foundation," Garrison said of the visual evidence of sinking, also noting ground surrounding the sump pump on the east side of the property is "completely eroded."

He also stated the city has failed to address faulty drains on the property of nearby business Crown Linen Service which exacerbate the North Briegel water problem.

Garrison said he went to the council meeting to demand accountability for the situation not being addressed for over a decade.

"This is not my fault. I didn't do this. This is a huge mess," Garrison continued.

He later added the city has recently made an effort to re-direct water from his property, although it took an action by the city council.

"You can't control Mother Nature, but I expect the City of Columbia to control Mother Nature when it's on their properties," he concluded.

Next to speak on Nov. 3 was Carl Woodcock, who resides in the 800 block of North Briegel Street. Woodcock is no stranger to public comment, speaking during several meetings in 2024 and 2025.

Woodcock, who has lived in the area since the 1970s, noted his basement had been flooded several times since early 2023, placing the blame on an incorrectly installed drain near his home which was needed to accommodate runoff from nearby new home construction.

The city had since conducted an engineering study and initiated some improvements, but Woodcock returned to speak in April to report those improvements were close to failing following several rounds of heavy rain.

At the time, Mayor Bob Hill explained the planned improvements were not yet completed.

In April, Woodcock also spoke about a lack of communication on the part of city officials, saying he was “bamboozled” at the lack of response to multiple communications sent to several officials.

Earlier this month, Woodcock brought up another issue, that of his insurance claim submission not being forwarded by the city for nearly three months.

Woodcock later told the *Republic-Times* he submitted an insurance claim with the city on Jan. 25.

He explained he was not contacted by the Illinois Municipal League Risk Management Association – the City of Columbia’s claims agency – until after the April 23 meeting.

Woodcock then received a letter of claim denial June 25, which he pointed out was only about three weeks prior to the statute of limitations expiring for his claim.

He then sent a rebuttal dated July 15, only to be informed of a second denial three weeks later.

“It seemed like the city wanted to drag their feet to make sure that (the statutory limit) time had expired,” Woodcock said.

During the Nov. 3 meeting, Woodcock asked why City Administrator Dug Brimm waited until April to forward his claim to the appropriate parties.

“I did talk to (Ward III Alderman) Jeff Huch before the (Nov. 3) meeting and he thought this was all taken care of. (Huch) did not realize that the city administrator had delayed the insurance claim by three months,” Woodcock said.

Last week, Woodcock told the *Republic-Times* the claim amount was only between \$6,000 and \$8,000, leading him to further question why the city would refuse to cooperate with a resident over a relatively small cost.

The last to speak was Eric Castelli, resident of the 300 block of Carr Creek Drive in the Joy View Acres Subdivision in the southern end of Columbia east of Route 3 off Gall Road.

Castelli spoke during the Aug. 4 meeting about an “unpermitted drain” which was a “significant contributor to flooding along Carr Creek Drive.”

Castelli has reported flood risks at his residence since he purchased the property in 2018.

He later told the *Republic-Times* he was also speaking on behalf of several other subdivision residents who were either hesitant to speak publicly or who feared possible retaliation from the city.

He returned during public comment Nov. 3 with “implications for the city” due to its failure to remedy the situation.

Those implications and more may be found on Castelli’s website, columbiadeservesbetter.org, which documents in detail the issues which have arisen since the second phase of development in Joy View Acres began 2006 – coinciding with installation of the “unpermitted drains” on an adjoining property which is not part of the actual subdivision.

The drains in question allow runoff from the Burroughs Road Subdivision to the north which includes residences on Burroughs Court and South Carl Street that have a base elevation about 50 feet higher than the Joy View Acres properties.

Work in the Burroughs Road development, approved in 1987, was done mostly by H.J. Frierdich & Sons, the same company which developed lots in Joy View Acres until it was dissolved as an LLC in 2017.

It is unknown who installed the drainage pipes between Burroughs Road and Joy View Acres, but their presence is noted in a drainage review conducted by the city in 2023 using Millennia Professional Services of Illinois.

The study found that the designs for the second phase of Joy View Acres “do not appear to show drainage areas off to the north,” and based on the final plat submitted to the city, “it is apparent (the planners) were aware of the off-site area to the north that would flow to the site. However, for unknown reason, it seems they chose to not consider this area in their final design shown in their grading and drainage plan.”

The drainage review stated the best course of action would be to “eliminate the off-site flow-through area,” which would require a redirection of the runoff from Burroughs Road away from Joy View Acres.

The city opted to avoid any redirection of the “offsite” water, instead choosing the fourth of four recommendations – that being a widening of drains on Carr Creek Drive – which does nothing to prevent flooding on other subdivision properties.

A letter sent to Castelli on July 29, which has recently been confirmed as the city’s final stance on the matter, states that in October 2024, “the city implemented the recommendation identified as providing the most beneficial effect to the neighborhood – at its own expense. As previously discussed, the city’s approach will be incremental, allowing us to evaluate the impact of each action before proceeding further.”

Castelli claims the city chose to widen existing drains after failing to negotiate what would have been a costly resolution with the owner of the property containing the problematic drain pipes.

Not satisfied with the progress – the only work thus far being the widening of one drain on Carr Creek Drive from 24 to 36 inches – Castelli returned Nov. 3 with a “call to action,” citing the city’s failure to enact its own storm water ordinances and stating his intentions to enact a number of investigations with state and federal agencies.

The investigations Castelli described are less about flooding than the proximity of Joy View Acres to Carr Creek, a tributary of the Mississippi River.

Castelli noted that allowing existing drains in Joy View Acres to flow directly into Carr Creek – including one on his property – is a violation of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Clean Water Act.

Castelli is also seeking a “review of illegal modifications” through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers relating to the “off-site” drains.

On Monday, Castelli filed a “formal liability notice” with the city, which could trigger record retention and could potentially open the city to civil claims in the matter.

Castelli’s case is unique among the other Joy View residents because his home has been designated as a FEMA “Special Flood Hazard Area,” along with a few other properties near the creek.

According to FEMA’s National Flood Insurance Program protocols, municipalities are required to “prevent increased damages” in designated flood zones.

What further complicates Castelli's situation is his daughter, who is diagnosed with Angelman Syndrome – a rare genetic disorder causing severe developmental delays – intellectual disability, speech impairment and balance problems.

She obtained a certificate of graduation from Columbia High School this summer and still lives with her parents at the Carr Creek Drive residence while continuing services at CHS.

Standing water near the Castelli residence poses a real threat to his daughter's safety, as she has a fascination with water, a common condition associated with Angelman Syndrome.

Castelli was also incensed by what he perceived to be an intentional omission of public comment from the city's Facebook livestream of the Nov. 3 meeting.

While there have been slight "technical difficulties" during past livestreams, Castelli and Woodcock both noted the suspicious length of the issue Nov. 3 – with all public comment omitted.

Mayor Hill sent Castelli an email Nov. 9 to inform him the full meeting would be available once the "upload processing is complete."

The city is not legally obligated to provide recordings of their meetings, but the full Nov. 3 meeting was still unavailable as of press time Tuesday night.

During a tour of the subdivision on Friday, Castelli stated he doesn't expect the city to address the problems, rather, his goal is to make the public aware of how the current city administration treats its residents.

He labeled the city's apparent policy of dealing with water issues as "Deny and Delay."

That appears to be the case with Castelli and other Joy View Acres residents as well as Garrison and Woodcock.

All admit that the current city government has been forced to deal with the fallout over developments which were approved prior to the current mayor's election in 2021, with only two aldermen – Huch and Ward IV's Steve Holtkamp – being on the council prior to 2019.

However, according to minutes of a 2017 committee meeting, the city has been aware of drainage issues prior to the uptick in development the past decade.

Former Ward IV Alderman Mary Ellen Niemietz noted during a September 2017 committee meeting she had received "calls for 20 years in regard to the drainage in her ward," adding that problems have been around since development began in the late 1980s and that there were "not a lot of good policies in place."

During that same meeting, City Engineer Chris Smith discussed the Joy View Acres issue in particular and city water issues in general, stating “the problems are with all the different builders in the subdivisions,” adding “the developer doesn’t think they have anything to do with it since the lots have been sold.”

Late last year, referring obliquely to the Joy View Acres situation, the city passed an amendment to its code to include a “drainage disclaimer.”

During the Aug. 26, 2024, meeting, Brimm advised the council that recent rains brought the “performance of stormwater systems and drainage improvements in various subdivisions” to the city’s attention.

While not admitting fault, Hill said the city would be liable for repairs involving “the subdivision... south of town,” likely Joy View Acres.

Despite the apparent laissez-faire attitude with developers in the city’s past forcing current city officials to face the consequences of those policies, another Columbia contractor may soon be receiving a seemingly free pass recently to do business in Columbia.

JLP Design & Build LLC, formerly JLP Homes – the subject of several previously reported ongoing lawsuits – applied for its business permit on Nov. 7.

A *Republic-Times* record request following the report of alleged fraud involving the owners of JLP Design and Build in collusion with another Columbia property company revealed the city had no record of a business permit being issued for 208 N. Main Street. That is the listed address of JLP Homes at jlphomes.com.

However, there are no records of a business permit being issued to either JLP Homes or JLP Design & Build for 2024 or 2025.

An occupancy violation filed by a Columbia resident Nov. 6 was marked as “resolved” per a reply email from the city regarding the supposed violation stating JLP Design & Build had “applied for the business license” as of Nov. 7.

There was also activity on South Main Street at the site of a partially-demolished trailer court.

In late September, the demolition of those trailers was stopped when it was discovered the property owners had not conducted required asbestos testing on the structures.

Over the weekend, social media posts noted the appearance of spray-painted “P,” “N” and “X” designations on some of the remaining trailers.

It is not known if the recent labels are indicative of any asbestos testing results.

The Illinois EPA has not responded to repeated requests for comment as of press time.

The property in question happens to be owned in part by Paul and Grant Frierdich, both of whom worked for H.J. Frierdich & Sons prior to its dissolution – the same company that performed a majority of work in the Burroughs Road and Joy View Acres subdivisions.