

July 17, 2019

Via E-mail

Congress of The United States
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Small Business
2361 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6315

Dear Committee Members:

On the night of July 11 and into July 12, 2017, The Lake County/Libertyville, Illinois received approximately seven inches of rainfall causing widespread flooding in the area. The cause of the flooding from our research and understanding initially was that it was the result of a freak storm and a local municipal water/sewer system that was antiquated and unable to handle the deluge. Water entered through the sewer line and up through the basement bathroom drains. Through follow-up meetings and discussions, the water/sewer system was only part of the issue and apparently some of the issue is that the system has not kept up with the ever-expanding development of lot-filling McMansions and other heavy development along the Des Plaines River. While I am no expert on why it flooded, I can share its impact on me and my business.

When the flood occurred, my family pizzeria was nearing its third anniversary. To that point I had not never experienced any real flooding in my business. We had a mop sink back up a couple of times but that was because of debris in the drain.

What we experienced on July 12, 2017 was 4-6 inches of blackwater (tainted with human waste and grease from our grease trap) floating around my basement kitchen, party room and into all floor / near floor equipment and products.

I have submitted a video of what I walked into that morning and I was literally heartbroken. I knew we would be shut down, at least in our basement and prep area, for a few days but didn't fully comprehend what a hassle this was going to be.

We acted fast and were able to engage a flood remediation company at a great price to get going on our flood mitigation. Our insurance company, Society Insurance was also quick to respond. While we were able to get the pace mostly cleaned up in two days, my party room was shut down because we needed to remove and replace doors and drywall, among other things, and ensure the space was ready for food prep

preparation. Everyone pitched in to get this done in a timely fashion and we were able to reopen for limited service on my main floor in a few days.

Then on 8/28/18, it happened again, albeit less water. We still needed to bring in another flood remediation company and pay another insurance deductible. As a small business, with sales of about \$1,100,000 annually at the time, we live and operate paycheck to paycheck. Having to absorb loss of business, pay two insurance deductibles and have to do so without sixty seats of our party room and prep kitchen left me feeling helpless. When it happened again six weeks, you can imagine my thoughts. Obviously, my insurance premiums went up as well. Staff retention was a challenge as we had to scale back for a bit and nothing was quite right operationally for a few weeks as our mixer was down and we had to make our pizza dough two doors down at a neighboring restaurant. You can imagine how difficult my monthly loan payments to the SBA became during this period, though we never missed or were never late with our payment.

However, the lasting effect of this also debilitating as there has not been a major rainstorm since that I have not sat awake and or driven directly to the restaurant to see if it's happening again. We've seen a few more minor incidents and have come to learn that much of this is caused by an age and capacity issue with our municipal sewer system. Moreover, some of the capacity issues redate directly to new development in the area.

Our local municipality has been quick to act and address this issues as best they can, but this does little to ease my mind every time I see big storms on the radar. Many in our community were hit harder than my business and my heart goes out to them. In fact, we subsequently did a fundraising effort for a family that lives near the Des Plaines River in Vernon Hills/Mettawa whose home was inundated by the floods.

Since that time, new development seems to moving ahead full steam both up and down the river and around Libertyville and its surrounding towns. Having worked in residential and commercial real estate development in the past and now owning my own small business, I understand the many sides to this complex issue. With that said, I think for the good of all involved, including local businesses, home owners and renters currently in place and those who would hope to live in new developments, it is imperative that local, state and federal officials figure out how to mitigate the larger issues of wetland protection, over-development and sprawl so that those of us who are left to live, work and raise our families in the area can do so with confidence that the homes and businesses we have invested our life savings into are able to operate and thrive without the threat of catastrophic flooding that nearly eliminated my favorite place, Pizzeria DeVille.

Sincerely,

John P. Durning
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