

An important reminder Successful stormwater projects show value of well-executed government spending

There is doubtless some justification for persistent complaints about the levels of government spending that dominate local, state and federal budgeting. That said, it also bears noticing when well planned and executed government spending plays an important role in protecting our quality of life.

A front-page story Sunday by our Russell Lissau provides an excellent case in point.

Lissau's report described how millions of dollars in public works projects spared some local communities from catastrophic flooding that would have been the usual result of the deluges that swamped the region in mid-April.

In Wheeling, Village Manager Jon Sfondilis told Lissau that the month's storms would have been disastrous if not for the \$9 million in improvements the village has invested in its stormwater system over the past 10 years.

He cited portions of the village that used to routinely suffer the damages resulting from prolonged storms but now remained generally safe.

"While no community is immune to an outlier weather event, years of strategic planning and infrastructure improvements paid off when we needed them most," Sfondilis said.

In Mount Prospect, a \$36 million levee built along Des Plaines River Road in 2015, worked in concert with three pump stations to protect hundreds of homes and dozens of businesses.

In Des Plaines, \$50 million worth of stormwater and flood-abatement work over several decades protected numerous whole neighborhoods near the Des Plaines River that in previous years would have been swamped and dealing with damages ranging from flooded basements to ruined furniture and electrical outages. It is a telling detail about the breadth of past disasters that Des Plaines spokesman Brad Goodman was pleased that portions of only three streets had to be shut down during the peak of the flooding.

"The city's only impacted areas were directly adjacent to the river," Goodman said

Reflecting on the lack of complaints his village received, Mundelein Village Administrator Eric Guenther couldn't help noticing how much better his community is positioned to deal with devastating rains.

"(The remediations are) putting us in a much better position today," he told Lissau.

Of course, communities are right to monitor the spending of their leaders closely, and we all should make sure that officials at every level of government know we will not tolerate excessive or unnecessary expenditures. At the same time, it's also important for us to remember that not all government spending is waste. The experience of three suburban communities successfully protecting against the ravages of repeated floods offers one such reminder.