

MADISON

Landslide collapses apartment building in Marshall as French Broad rises

Paul Moon The Citizen-Times

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MARSHALL - Heavy rain that caused part of a building to collapse has Madison County residents and business owners concerned about the broader impact of flooding.

Roughly a mile from Blannahassett Island, on Walnut Creek Road, the back portion of a home converted into apartments gave way after a land mass slid into the 1,300-square foot building.

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“I thought it was thunder,” said Kenny Ray, who lives in a front apartment of the three-unit building. “I pulled back the shade, looked out the window and saw that it wasn’t thunder.”

Ray said he called 911 before checking on the status of his neighbor, who he helped safely evacuate the home. “When I got to the front door, the floor inside was down below.”

Ray said he planned to spend the weekend with family leaving nearby before building inspectors could determine whether his apartment would be safe to reoccupy. “Hopefully I’ll be back on Monday,” he said with the knowledge that his neighbor would not be so lucky. “It’s a total loss,” he said of the back apartment.

Water at edge of Marshall High Studios

On Blannahassett Island, a roughly 6-acre land mass in the middle of the French Broad River in downtown Marshall, water lapped up to the foundation of Marshall High Studios by 4 p.m.

April 19. Built in 1928, the former Marshall High School building is now home to artists studios.

Rob Pulleyn stood outside the property he owns as the French Broad River overflowed its banks and filled the parking lot. The site flooded significantly at the end of 2018, when the river climbed 7 feet in roughly 12 hours. Pulleyn estimated that incident cost over \$5,000 in cleanup and restoration work, with new mulch and gravel required.

“I think we’ll have to figure out a new way to landscape,” Dave Schmucker, the site’s facilities manager said as rising waters threatened to take a Honda Accord parked outside down river.

River levels spiked by roughly 8 feet in a matter of hours, to more than 11 feet in Marshall by 6:45 p.m., according to data from the U.S. Geological Survey. Flood level is 8 feet.

“What’s strange is for two floods like this to come through in months,” Schmucker said. “I’ll be back here tomorrow for cleanup.”

Downtown Marshall

Pumps were working overtime in downtown Marshall as Main Street property owners tended to their basements.

At Penland & Sons Department Store, Georgette and Mike Shelton watched as their pump system prevented water from filling unfinished storage space below the store Georgette’s family has owned for generations.

“What else can you do,” Mike said. “Hopefully it didn’t rain hard in Brevard, because that water will be here by tomorrow.”

Louis Roberts, Madison County’s emergency management coordinator, said he was in touch with the county’s fire departments, sheriff’s office and Department of Transportation crews to ensure resources were deployed where needed.

“Every fire department is out on calls right now,” he said as he visited Blannahassett Island shortly after 5 p.m. Roberts said he was also in touch with state officials to determine whether a state of emergency would be declared.

As of 7 p.m. April 19, forecasts from the National Weather Service predicted French Broad River levels would climb to nearly 13 feet by 6 a.m. April 20.

“Hopefully, the rain stops and the flood waters subside,” Roberts said.