

JERSEY VILLAGE STAR

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Harris County Flood Control Draws Standing Room Only Crowd

**SPECIAL EDITION
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Representatives of the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD) informed council and a standing-room only crowd of over 250 residents of the progress made by the district on alleviating flooding in Jersey Village at the January 20, 2003 City Council meeting. Kirk Hooper, Program Manager for the district introduced himself and Clay Haynes before explaining the progress on meeting the project goals presented to the City last year by district director, Mike Talbot. Hooper also informed Council on efforts by HCFCD to purchase two tracts of land on Jones Road at White Oak Bayou for detention purposes. The owners of 2/3 of that land have agreed to a selling price and the county is preparing the purchase at this time. The owner of the other tract is refusing to sell so the county plans to condemn the land

According to Hooper, the first phase of construction on White Oak Bayou includes re-grading the bypass on the North side of Jersey Village to make water flow easterly towards Beltway 8 and building a detention basin between Gessner and Beltway 8, which was partially excavated last summer. The design phase is 85% complete on this project, with the exception of acquiring some storm water quality permits from Harris County and the Army Corps of Engineers, which takes a minimum of 60 days to acquire. Councilmember Greg Holden asked about water that comes down the bypass and into White Oak Bayou at the intersection behind Wyndham. Holden asked if everything to the north of the proposed bypass is flowing through Jersey Village. Hooper said that was generally true. Holden asked if HCFCD would plug the pipe that flows from the bypass into White Oak. Hooper explained that the pipe would need to remain open in order for the water to come out of White Oak Bayou into the bypass. Councilmember A.J. Widacki asked if there was any reason the 72" pipe that is a restrictor to the eastward flow of the water could be

removed during regrading in phase one. Hooper said that the bypass holds a lot of capacity that does not have sufficient detention available downstream. Widacki said he realized the water cannot be pushed downstream but a restrictor could be put there in order to add some additional capacity. Hooper replied that HCFCD built a restrictor at Beltway 8 and that would be a different model. He stated they are 85% finished with the design and they could talk about it but that would be "reinventing the wheel".

Continuing the discussion, Hooper addressed the second phase of construction which is upstream of North Houston-Rosslyn. A control structure will be removed and the conveyance of the channel will be improved upstream to Beltway 8. Further construction on two detention basins at Fairbanks-North Houston, are included in this phase. Another detention basin at Hollister Road has been excavated up to an Exxon Mobile Pipeline. Completion of the basin is awaiting Exxon Mobile adjusting the pipeline in order for water to flow across it effectively. HCFCD is about 75% complete on the design of this phase. Permits from the Corps of Engineers will be needed before construction commences. It will probably be the first of June before HCFCD receives approval from the Army Corps of Engineers.

The third phase will begin after the first two are complete and consists of final construction of the Jersey Village By-pass. The channel needs to be deepened and enlarged. Construction is scheduled for the summer of 2004. HCFCD began the design phase of this project in February and it is now 80% complete.

In answer to a question by Mayor Heathcott on the timeline of the second phase, Hooper said the district

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(flood control continued)

is awaiting the Corps of Engineers permits in order to advertise for bids in May or June. Hooper said phase two is a large project and could take 18 months to two years from start of construction to completion.

City Manager Dale Brown stated that on very heavy rains the flooding seems to occur at the junction of the proposed bypass and White Oak Bayou behind Wyndham Village. He asked if it will be possible, after phase one, for the water to flow into the bypass after it reaches a certain level. Hooper said the water already does that; however there is a plug which is restricting the easterly flow. That plug will be removed.

Brown continued by noting that after the 1998 flood, it seemed a lot of water was flowing down from the proposed bypass, by way of a small channel, to the south side of the bypass and then spilling over into Jersey Village. Brown asked if the channel could be re-built at one time, if the effects of the overflow that is getting into Lakeview, Honolulu, Wellwyn and some other areas might be able to be diverted and kept in the channel. Hooper responded by explaining that the work must go from downstream upwards in order to not move the flood from one group of people to another group. He reminded council that the conveyance and water storage must be put in first.

Brown asked why there are no restrictors upstream of Jersey Village. Hooper said there is one at E132 east of 1960 off of Fallbrook. Brown said that is 4 to 5 miles upstream. Widacki said that is at the far, upper end of the watershed and is providing little relief. Brown was more interested in a restrictor within a mile or less of

the Jersey Village City limits. Hooper said two detention basins will be going in and reminded everyone that the district cannot just put a restrictor in without somewhere for the water to flow because it would just back up on someone else, which is not a possibility. He said maybe once the detention basins are in, HCFCFD will know how it intends to utilize the land planned to acquire and how much will be useful. Without some storage facility at this point, the district cannot put in a restrictor.

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Widacki said he talked with Clay Haynes in December regarding the possibility of the City of Jersey Village providing funds and/or some type of incentive clause in the contracts with the contractors offering funding in support of the Flood Control District if these projects were completed more quickly. Hooper said right now the district does not want to do that but there are other things they can do to speed up the contract such as shortening days allowed to the contractor. Widacki said Commissioner Eversole stated that funding for the Jersey Village project is not a problem, it is a matter of getting the work designed and getting projects along. If that is the case, the money needs to be thrown at it so it can be done faster. He knows everyone would appreciate it and expects it that way. Council member Preece asked what was the purpose of putting in the restrictors south of Jersey Village in the first place if it only impedes the water that flows downstream; what effect has that had on Jersey Village and the flooding from the past 5 years.

Councilmen Preece said those restriction devices were put in on North Houston Roslyn in 1997 or 1998, which is coincidentally when the flooding problems began for Jersey Village. Hooper said they were put in because the channel improvements on White Oak Bayou started at Cole Creek and ended at that point. He explained that what happens is when a large conveyance improvement is completed, there is a draw down that sucks water into that area which results in more water than was modeled. Hooper said the draw down effect was not included in the mathematical model so HCFCFD designated a point, for a control structure in order to hold the water back to exactly the way the water was before the channel improvement. This restrictor did not help nor worsen the effect. Also the improvements they have discussed, what will be the flow under Beltway 8. Preece asked if there would be a detention pond or free flow through there. Hooper said that under Beltway 8 that water will free flow.

Council member Russell Hamley asked if the Flood Control District was prepared to purchase one tract of land without the other for the Jones Road detention. Hooper said "Absolutely, Yes". The tract east of Jones Road is part of the Federal Plan the district has been working on as a part of section 211, Federal funding. The tract to the west is something Flood Control is doing above and beyond what the federal project is providing. Council member Hamley asked where the design of the detention facility in Jersey Village stood. Hooper said it is just in the rough design phase; they do not have any engineering on the project as of yet but in the next couple of months they will get with an engineer about the project. ■

FEMA Buy-out

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides grant funds for the purchase of homes receiving substantial damage as a result of flooding. Substantial damage means repair damages totaling 50 percent or more of the estimated value of the home. A computer program, developed by FEMA, is used to calculate home value and estimated repair work. The FEMA program “corrects” for regional values in order to place the numbers on a national database. Homes experiencing flooding multiple times may have their cumulative repair costs considered for qualifying for the buy-out program. In Jersey Village, no homes received 50 percent or greater damages (based on repair costs) as a result of a single flood. By use of the cumulative provisions in the FEMA regulations approximately 100 homes in Jersey Village are being considered for possible buy-out. **At this point, however, no homes in Jersey Village have been approved for buy-out**

Being eligible for a buy-out does not mean the property will be bought. Part of the review process involves a cost/benefit analysis. In this case, the cost/benefit is whether it is to FEMA’s benefit to buy the property. FEMA is looking at whether it is cheaper to buy the property or continue paying out for remodeling. The remodeling costs are the amount paid out in claims by FEMA; not how much the property owner has paid out. In some cases these amount differ dramatically.

The Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD) administers the home buy-out program in Harris County, which includes Jersey Village. Harris County Commissioners Court authorized HCFCD to submit applications for home buy-out shortly after Tropical Storm Allison devastated the county. As part of administering the program, the county is providing the 25 percent funding match – FEMA provides a maximum of 75 percent of the cost of the property. The application

process is rather complicated. FEMA provides funds for buy-out to the state of Texas (Department of Public Safety, Division of Emergency Management). The state approves local applications, on a property by property basis. The local administering agency, HCFCD, in this instance, buys the property and is reimbursed 75 percent of the cost. Regulations established by FEMA state that all properties purchased will have all structures removed and never have structures placed on them again. At present, HCFCD has an application for funding for home buy-outs at the state waiting for approval. This application includes many homes from Harris County, approximately 60

of which are located in Jersey Village. The state has provided no timetable for approval of the application. Also, it is not likely that all properties submitted in the application will be approved.

HCFCD has confirmed with the city that the city will be notified if any homes in Jersey Village are approved for buy-out prior to any property owner being notified. HCFCD and the city will work with the property owners. Further, HCFCD is not providing name or addresses of any of the properties on the buy-out application until the state’s decision is known. The city will continue to closely monitor the buyout program to keep our citizens up to date. ■

Council Presents Flood Control Resolution to the County

Harris County Flood Control is considering the purchase and dedication of approximately 65 acres of land for storm water detention north and upstream of the City. Plans are to acquire 35 acres located on the south bank of White Oak Bayou north of Ranchstone Drive and east of Jones Road. A second 30-acre site is located along the north bank of White Oak Bayou, south of Fallbrook Drive and West of Jones Road. Dedication and implementation of these two tracts of land for retention would significantly delay the volume of storm water released into White Oak Bayou that flows directly through Jersey Village.

These proposed detention tracts lie within neighboring municipal utility districts, which derive their support from property taxes within a set incorporated area much like a city. Unfortunately, the City of Jersey Village has learned that the utility districts have expressed some opposition to seeing taxable land used for this public use. These detention projects are needed in order to control floodwaters, not just for Jersey Village but all development along White Oak Bayou.

On January 20, 2003, City Council passed a resolution supporting the County’s intent to purchase additional land slated for storm water detention and the resolution was recently presented to Harris County Commissioner’s Court. Art Storey, Harris County Executive Director of Public Infrastructure stated that the Jersey Village “City Council has been very effective and generous partners” in finding solutions to improving flood control in and around Jersey Village. He commented that he and the Commissioner’s Court are very aware of the discontent with enduring three damaging floods in such a short time span. Mr. Storey affirmed that the Commission will review our resolution “promptly and report to court what we can do with it”.

PRESS RELEASE FROM CONGRESSMAN KEVIN BRADY

For Immediate Release March 25, 2003

Progress Made on Jersey Village Flooding Improvements

Brady Announces \$400,000 for White Oak Bayou Flood Project

Washington, D.C. - United States Congressman Kevin Brady (R- The Woodlands) announced congressional funding of \$400,000 to fund engineering and construction of the White Oak Bayou Project downstream of Jersey Village. The funding was recently approved by Congress in its Omnibus Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 2003.

The local project, which will help relieve some of the frequent flooding in Jersey Village caused by flood waters backing up along the White Oak Bayou, is spearheaded by the Harris County Flood Control District and the Army Corps of Engineers.

“Jersey Village City leaders have been strong advocates for flood relief, and I am working hard to be responsive”,

said Brady, who has represented the community only since January when the new congressional lines took effect.

“This funding is important for two reasons. First, because downstream improvements on White Oak are critical to maximizing the impact of the Jersey Village detention and bypass channel projects.

“Second, we secured a unique designation for the project which allows it be built sooner. Every day counts when you know the next flood could be just around the corner.”

The White Oak project is only one in a handful of projects in the nation where construction work can occur now and later be justified for federal funding participation. This will allow the Harris County Flood Control District to start the project now and get reimbursed

later, thus accelerating the flood relief for area neighborhoods.

Brady credits House Majority Leader Tom Delay (R- Sugarland) as being instrumental in creating this new capability as a provision of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996.

Mayor Ed Heathcott of Jersey Village stated, “I am very appreciative of Representative Brady’s on-going support in helping to reduce flooding potential along White Oak Bayou. Flooding is the number one concern of the citizens in the Jersey Village area. This appropriation of \$400,000 initiated by Congressman Brady is a clear statement to the Jersey Village area citizens that he understands and shares our concern that corrective action on White Oak Bayou needs to be fast tracked.”



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