



Mayor's Monthly Newsletter

Written by Mayor Rod Erskine

September 2013
The Wall

Many of you have probably heard by now that the Federal Highway Administration has completed their review of TxDOT's re-evaluation of the US 290 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and has approved their construction plan. This is a plan that does not include items requested on a number of occasions by the city - a noise abatement wall along the freeway shoulder, and asphalt coating similar to that installed on Beltway 8 adjacent to JV. If you visit the www.my290.com website, you will find a link to the Environmental Impact Statement as approved, in addition to a wealth of information regarding the expansion project. If you navigate to page 18 of Appendix F (Traffic Noise Analysis Technical Report), you will find a description of a sound barrier wall to be built adjacent to a portion of Jersey Village's residential area. Plate 18 is a map of its location. The media have become aware of the proposed wall. For those of you who watch the news on Houston's local ABC affiliate, Channel 13, you may have seen a report by Miya Shay entitled "Highway 290 Expansion Comes at Noisy Cost for Some Jersey Village Residents", which was broadcast August 30, 2013. If you missed the broadcast, you can go to the KTRK website (abclocal.go.com) and find it by searching for "Jersey Village". At this time, few details of construction have been shared with JV as our city manager indicates in his interview with Ms. Shay.

On December 11 & 13 of 2012, TxDOT held two public hearings on the proposed US 290 expansion plan. I attended the December 13 session and met briefly with a TxDOT engineer regarding plans for noise abatement - I was told a wall in Jersey Village had been considered but was not in the plan as it had been deemed ineffective. Our city manager, our noise consultant, and our attorney were given similar information at the December 11 meeting.

Then in late July this year, we became aware that TxDOT had met with a group of residents who live on the south side of Seattle Street west of Senate, and at the west end of Singapore Lane and Congo Lane. The meeting was at Post Elementary on May 23, 2013 where TxDOT presented a plan for a 16 foot tall sound wall adjacent to their property, with the residents being asked to vote on building the wall, and on the wall's appearance. The city was not invited to the meeting by TxDOT, nor was it made aware that the meeting was even planned. TxDOT was then invited to make their presentation and answer questions at the August 19, 2013 city council meeting, but declined. They did provide a copy of the presentation package used at the meeting at the elementary school.

By the time you read this, the city manager, engineer, and I will have met with TxDOT to discuss their plans for the wall. One item needing clarification is the wall's actual extent - there is some disagreement in TxDOT's documents on this. The US 290 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) describes the wall as 1,611 feet long and costing \$463,935. However, their map shows the wall being closer to 3000 feet in length, as does the map TxDOT provided in the presentation package from the Post Elementary meeting. According to the maps, the wall would extend from the west end of Congo Lane south to Seattle Street, and then east along the south side of the residential property on Seattle Street to Senate. Timing of construction and acquisition of easement are other unknowns, as is the city's role - if any. If you are interested, please check the agenda for the September 16, 2013 council meeting to see if this will be discussed.

The proposed wall will be of great benefit to the residents living adjacent to it not only as a sound barrier, but by blocking the view of businesses and the freeway from their backyards, and by providing additional security from the perspective of restricting access to their property. However, while I am very thankful to TxDOT for this structure, it is not only the noise abatement the city has been pushing as mentioned above. The public comment period ends September 18, 2013, and the city will be working with our consultants on a formal response, as well as determining what options we may have going forward. I encourage our residents to visit the www.my290.com website and respond individually.

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