

**City of Bellaire**  
**Flood Hazard Mitigation Task Force**  
**Public Hearing Meeting Notes**  
**January 29, 2018**

Mr. Hofmann welcomed everyone to the public hearing and gave a brief overview of how the meeting would be run, procedurally. He then explained how and why the Floodplain Mitigation Task Force was created, and reviewed the draft matrix that was prepared by the Task Force, with the help of City staff. To view the entire matrix, please click [HERE](#). Mr. Hofmann then gave a timetable of upcoming events and stated that the goal is to have a final action plan completed by March 6<sup>th</sup>, to present to City Council on March 19<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Hofmann then opened the floor up to comments from the public.

**Public Comments:**

**Cindy Merrill**-Lives in a 1980s house, inside the loop, that has never flooded before. She stated that she has heard a rumor going around that a lot of water that came into Bellaire was being diverted to prevent the Medical Center from flooding, she asked if that was true. She also mentioned that she lives on a corner lot and asked for an explanation as to why the corner lots flood. Ms. Merrill asked what was going to be done to prevent that from happening in the future.

**Jim Burrough, 4613 Holt**- He stated that he is a retired emergency management professional and has to congratulate the Task Force on the draft of the document. He recognized the amount of effort that had to go into it. He mentioned line 8 & 10 of the matrix, which deal with the formation of teams that would be responsible for field reconnaissance and rescue. He stated that he has a long and deep relationship with the Amateur Radio Emergency Service, as do many other individuals throughout the City. Mr. Burrough felt that it would not be a hard task to put together a team of individuals who have a great deal of experience in assisting with City infrastructure. He also mentioned that he is a current member of the Harris County Citizen Emergency Response Team (CERT), as are other residents within Bellaire. Mr. Burrough then pointed out that line 14 places emphasis on planning and suggested that the most flood affected areas of the City should take the highest priority. He added that the emphasis should be placed on the flood mitigation aspect of it rather than the road quality aspect of making those decisions. Mr. Burroughs then mentioned line 28, specifically the last paragraph, and stated that it is very clear that if this program is undertaken, the City is going to have to make a very concerted effort to evaluate all of the possible negative impacts. In particular, the most negatively impacted population in this flood is also the most vulnerable to severe economic effects, and will have the least to gain the most to lose if this is not handled appropriately. Mr. Burrough felt that there is a deficiency in the document, as there is no line item that mentions City planning to prevent the loss of city equipment and other assets, especially those housed at the public works facility.

**Daniel Karp**-Moved into Bellaire in 2011, and also lives in a home on a corner lot. He stated that he was in attendance to thank the Task Force and hopefully be constructive. Mr. Karp stated that has been horrified with the construction that has taken place in the City within the last two years. He mentioned the walking path on Newcastle that was redone in 2015, which is either flat or leaning the wrong way. He explained that it funnels water down into the street. He stated that he watched the construction people creating plumes of cement dust in front of his house without wearing masks, and in 2016 he watched them fill up the opening to the sewer on the corner of his street with excess cement. He stated that with all due respect he thinks that the City could do a much better job. Mr. Karp mentioned that he knows of at least one settlement in town and would like to know how many more there have been. Please get quality people to work in the City. He congratulated the Task Force on the matrix, but mentioned that "gauge" is misspelled twice on line 15. Mr. Karp added that he hopes that a moratorium will be put on land covering with cement.

**David Swensen**-Questioned whether the City is talking to Dr. Bedient at Rice University about analyzing why, what, and how the flooding took place.

**Helen Ross**-Lives on Jonathan street and flooded. She added that she moved into Bellaire in 2004, and at that time was told by the permit department that Bellaire was working on very extensive plans to help mitigate flooding in Bellaire and that she shouldn't worry. Ms. Ross stated that she found out later that those plans had been shelved and urged the Task Force to please prioritize and activate a plan so that the City doesn't flood again.

**William Durbin, 4535 Sunburst**-Thanked the Task Force for the tremendous effort that they have made. He mentioned line 16 of the matrix and stated that he felt as though it is a really great idea to convert the City's waste water treatment plant into a detention area, and evaluate the conversion of the dog park and soccer fields along Edith Street into a detention area as well. He understands that for each foot of land in an acre there is a potential for detention or retention of about 330,000 gallons. Mr. Durbin questioned whether it would be possible to look for other areas in the City that could be made into detention areas, specifically, the one acre plat to the east of Bellaire Boulevard, which is currently a church property that has been for sale for some time.

**Mark Thiel**-Echoed the previous comments regarding the great work that has been done by the Task Force. He mentioned the backflow prevention devices that are being considered, and stated that he is familiar with how they work in pressurized lines, but not in a gravity system. Mr. Thiel stated that he would like to know mechanically how it would work and how fail safe it will be.

**Charles Bearden, 4610 Evergreen**- Thanked the Task Force members for their work. Mr. Bearden questioned how much is known about the causes of the flooding, and to what extent is it understood what the weight of each cause was. He asked if the bulk of the problem was with the bayou, or water that could not drain from Bellaire, or water that flowed from elsewhere. Are there any documents that might address that?

**Susan Downs**-Lives outside the loop on a cul-de-sac and did not flood, although it was very terrifying to see the water rising so close to her back door. She stated that she has spoken with several people who were flooded in Bellaire and in Houston, and their main complaint was that the high water rescue vehicles caused significant waves, which added more water into each of the houses. She stated that the wake was banging cars against the garages, and that it would behoove the drivers to slow down and not cause secondary damage to homes and cars.

**Belinda Schmidt**-Mentioned that a lot of older homes within the City are being sold for lot value and being bought with the potential of building larger homes with a greater footprint of concrete. She questioned whether the City or Task Force have considered changing the building codes with regard to lot coverage. Ms. Schmidt also mentioned that large oak trees drink a lot of water, and help with flooding. She pointed that there are mature trees that are going to be cut down at Feld Park and asked how that would impact future flooding in that area of the City.

**Lynn McBee**-Mentioned that there was a January 9<sup>th</sup> draft report of the matrix that she had printed and marked up, only to find out that there is now an updated version. She asked that the changes from the previous report be explained. She stated that Jim Burrough commented on one of her points, which was dealing with the loss of City equipment. Ms. McBee mentioned that this is the second flood that the City has been caught short in, and is now collecting some insurance money due to the fact that flood insurance was finally obtained. She stated that while the City is getting reimbursed, it is time to start protecting City vehicles with parking garages. She felt that all City buildings should have public parking garages in an effort to get away from surface parking, which in her opinion only adds to the issue of flooding. Ms. McBee also felt that streets should not be serving as the City's floodways, it is nonsense. She mentioned that line 16 of the matrix discusses subdivisions, which no one in the City is familiar with, and stated that it would be beneficial to better communicate the names of subdivisions and where they are at. Ms. McBee also felt that the City should have public meetings with other elected and appointed officials. She agreed with Ms. Downs' comment regarding high water vehicles, and felt that the City should purchase boats and store them on the roof. Ms. McBee stated that there is a lack of planning for the public good, and that the City should be making it a priority to educate the residents within the City about what type of drainage to install on their properties.

Questions/Comments from the Task Force:

**Millie Hast**-Mentioned the rumor that Ms. Merrill had brought up regarding the water being diverted from the Medical Center into Bellaire. She stated that she had also heard that a number of times, and asked if anyone with the City could respond.

**James Andrews, City Engineer**-Stated that he doesn't know the particulars on it, but there are backflow prevention systems in that area which help to prevent backup from the Bayou. He added that this would not have created additional flooding within Bellaire.

**Millie Hast**-Feels that the matrix includes some good ideas, but questioned whether it will prevent flooding in Bellaire.

**James Andrews**-Will not prevent flooding in an event like Harvey, but it will help to prevent the smaller, higher frequency storms, such as the Tax Day and Memorial Day floods. He added that the focus needs to be on the major component, and that is Project Brays. He added that the section that will help Bellaire the most is under construction right now. Mr. Andrews stated that the improvement will drop the water surface elevation down and will help Bellaire to better withstand a heavy localized rainfall.

A member of the public asked Mr. Andrews to explain that in more detail.

He explained that during Harvey, the bayou was above the banks for over a day and at the banks for another day, and there was no place for the water to go. Project Brays will help in that regard. Mr. Andrews added that the Task Force is also exploring potential flood relief structures through the railroad track.

A member of the public asked how long it will take to complete Project Brays.

Mr. Andrews stated that it is scheduled to be completed in 2021.

**Millie Hast**-So the draft plan of the Task Force is just preventing against the 100 year event?

Mr. Andrews explained that it could potentially do more than that, but it will not prevent flooding completely.

**Win Frazier**-Mentioned that there has been reference to the fact that the streets within Bellaire have been designed to flood.

Mr. Andrews stated that Bellaire was built in pockets, leaving some streets higher than others. He added that the bond program will be focusing on those streets that were built lower. He added that the streets have always been and always will be part of the drainage system for the City of Bellaire.

**Win Frazier**-Wanted the public to know that the City is doing what it can to communicate with other groups and organizations about what is taking place in the area.

**David Roylance**-Asked Mr. Andrews to explain how a backflow preventer works, specifically with the comment made regarding the medical center.

Mr. Andrews explained that the system is a mechanical device that works from pressure. The intention is that once the bayou rises to a certain level, the backflow preventer shuts due to pressure, which then brings up the capacity in the system from localized rainfall. He added that as the bayou goes down, the system opens back up.

**David Roylance**-Asked Mr. Hofmann to share a little bit about how the code changes did create improvements in building within Bellaire.

Mr. Hofmann explained that in 2007, the City put into place a regulation that every home must be built one foot above the base flood elevation. He added that of the 2,000 structures that received flooding from Harvey, less than 50 of them were built in 2007 or later. Mr. Hofmann stated that this information gives good evidence that the standards work. He mentioned that the Task Force has been taking into consideration other building codes with regard to lot coverage and impervious coverage as well.

A member of the public mentioned flood repairs that are being done without a permit.

Mr. Hofmann acknowledged that the City is aware that this is happening and is doing its best to monitor the situation. He encouraged anyone that is doing work without a permit to please go by the Development Services Department to obtain one, and added that it is beneficial to the property owner to have a permit. Mr. Hofmann added that the City will stop work at the site if they find work being done without a permit.

**Michael Ling**-What is the most effective way to mitigate flooding/prevent the next flood?

Mr. Hofmann mentioned that if the completion of Project Brays proves to be as helpful as has been promised, and all other factors that create the calculation of the BFE are held constant, almost all of Bellaire will be pulled out of the 100 year floodplain. He added that the City's current building standards are also proving to be reliable. Mr. Hofmann suggested that with the initiative brought forward by Mr. Andrews, the City could begin to store more water by creating an underground detention system that will be designed to store a 100 year flood event. He added that this project is potentially very effective and practical and is currently in the design phase.

**Michael Ling**-What are the most significant measures of mitigation that the city can employ to help to prevent flooding in the future?

Mr. Hofmann stated that detention would be the most significant measure that the City can take, whether it is above or below ground.

**Win Frazier**-Mentioned that the topic of flooding on corner lots had been mentioned. He asked if there is an explanation as to if or why a corner lot would be more prone to flooding.

Mr. Andrews stated that he does not have any factual information on if/why that might be the case, but mentioned that it could depend on the elevation of the street at that location.

**Mr. Reich**-Mentioned a comment made by the public regarding the demolition of older homes and new homes, with a larger footprint, replacing them. He added that his understanding is that the new construction, based on the current building code, would actually take up less of a footprint than the older homes do.

Mr. Hofmann explained that the chances are that the requirements for the new structure are going to be more stringent than what was in place when the prior structure was built.

A member of the public mentioned that there have been at least four major floods in recent years and asked why the term 100 year flood is still being used.

Mr. Hofmann mentioned that neither the City Engineer nor City staff is saying that the factors used in determining what a 100 year flood do not need to be updated. He added that the standards that are used to calculate the intensity and frequency of storms will likely change.

Mr. Hofmann then informed the public that there would be a Harvey recognition ceremony held on Monday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, at 6:00 PM, followed by the State of the City Address at 7:00 PM. He added that the Task Force has taken their positions very seriously and that there is a lot of information to digest. Mr. Hofmann stated that there will be a lot of important and hard decisions that will need to be made in the upcoming months, but that the Task Force and the City are hearing what the public is saying and are taking those suggestions into consideration. He thanked everyone for coming and mentioned that the next meeting of the Task Force will be on February 6<sup>th</sup>, at 6:30 PM in the CenterPoint Energy Room.