

City of Bellaire
Floodplain Mitigation Task Force
Meeting Notes
February 6, 2018

Mr. Hofmann welcomed everyone to the meeting and mentioned that only three members of the Task Force were in attendance. He stated that the purpose of the meeting was to have a discussion about the comments that were made during the January 29th public hearing. Mr. Hofmann also mentioned that a review and discussion of the matrix is on the agenda, however, he didn't feel that it would be appropriate to move forward with that until a majority of the Task Force is present.

Mr. Hofmann then went through each of the public comments that were made during the public hearing. To view all of the comments, please see the notes from January 29, 2018.

Mr. Hofmann made the following comments about the public's concerns:

Contrary to what the public believes, the City did make preparations for City equipment and vehicles during the storm. He added that the loss of vehicles took place at the wastewater treatment plant, where employees were needed to continue manning the plant during the event. Mr. Hofmann stated that a high water rescue vehicle was also damaged during its involvement in a rescue effort; however, no patrol cars or fire apparatus were lost. He added that he isn't sure that he would do anything differently if he had to do it all again.

Mike Leech, Director of Public Works-Stated that it is his firm belief that if they did not have employees manning the wastewater treatment plant during the event, it would have ceased to operate. He stated that although some vehicles were lost, the sanitary services were able to continue throughout the storm.

Council Member David Montague-Suggested that a line be added to the matrix for protecting City vehicles, including the risk and the mitigation. He then asked if the City could be turned into a TIRZ (Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone).

Mr. Hofmann stated that it is a possibility, but it would depend on what is trying to be accomplished and whether or not the math works. He added that in his opinion, turning the whole City into a TIRZ would defeat the purpose. Mr. Hofmann explained that the idea of a TIRZ is to carve out a certain section of the City that is both going to create the increment and benefit from the increment so that the rest of the tax payers don't have to bear the burden. He added that the City would essentially be saying that because of decisions that we are making, the property in this district is going to be more valuable in the future than it is now, and part of the strategy to making that property more valuable is public improvements, i.e. streets, sewer systems, wastewater lines, etc. The improvements are used to capture that increment and are

then used to pay off the debt service associated with the capital program for those public improvements. The commercial properties that would benefit from it would be the ones bearing that burden.

Win Frazier-Are there enough commercial businesses in the City right now to make that feasible?

Mr. Hofmann stated that this would be the big unanswered question. He added that usually this type of thing happens when a big developer comes into the City and proposes something to the City Council.

Mr. Hofmann then stated that there was concern by one of the members of the public about the level of construction that is being done within the City. He added that he isn't sure that will impact the work of the Task Force. Mr. Hofmann also stated that the City has not been in contact with Dr. Bedient from Rice University, and that he has confidence in the work that was done by the City's engineer. He then mentioned a resident who stated that she was told by the Development Services Department that she should have not have any worries about flooding. Mr. Hofmann stated that he was not sure about that. He also pointed out that someone asked if the old church property by the railroad tracks on Bellaire Boulevard could be made into detention. Mr. Hofmann stated that this would need to be analyzed by the City's engineer to determine if it is hydrologically feasible. He added that it could potentially be something that the City of Bellaire could bring to the table which might benefit the City's downstream partners.

James Andrews, City Engineer- Stated that he would hate to spend City money to transform the property into a detention facility and begin to detain the City of Houston's water. He added that backflow prevention from Brays Bayou would be a necessity in a situation like that. Mr. Andrews felt that regional detention for Bellaire would be more beneficial upstream, on the west side of Harris and Fort Bend County.

Mayor Andrew Friedberg- Asked Mr. Andrews to comment on the concern voiced by a member of the public that extensive plans for drainage within the City had been shelved.

Mr. Andrews explained that there have been drainage studies done in the past, suggesting detention and improvements that have basically been carried forward through today, with the nuance being that now the City is now taking it a step further and putting in 100 year protection on localized City streets.

Mayor Friedberg- Mentioned that the studies completed have informed the plans, but those plans have not been sitting on the shelf; there have been successive bond programs at least as far back as the late 90's. He pointed out that 30% of the City's drainage has been improved thus far.

Mr. Andrews confirmed this.

Council Member Pollard asked what percentage of the drainage would be improved once all of the bond projects are completed.

Mr. Andrews stated that another 15 or 16 blocks would be improved, so probably 35%.

Mr. Hofmann then mentioned the comment regarding the backflow prevention concept that the Task Force has had discussions with Mr. Andrews about. He added that Mr. Leech has shared additional information with that resident who did respond that his question had been answered.

Council Member Pollard-Backflow preventers discussed in much more detail on the City's website. She asked him where that is located.

Mr. Hofmann explained that it is on the City's Task Force website (www.bellairetx.gov/taskforce), under "Local," and is titled "Flap Gates Memo."

Mr. Hofmann stated that questions were also asked about the Brays Project and the relationship between the flooding caused by overflows at Brays relative to the amount of rainfall that was received, which Mr. Andrews did speak to during the public hearing. He mentioned that there was a resident who stated that rescue vehicles created wakes which caused additional damage to homes and vehicles. Mr. Hofmann assured the public and the members that this is something that the city is sensitive too. He added that there was a discussion about lot coverage and what happens when newer homes replace older ones, which Mr. Rosenbaum spoke effectively about during the hearing. Mr. Hofmann mentioned that a resident stated that the January 9th draft of the report was not the most recent; however, it is the most recent version of the matrix.

Mr. Hofmann then asked members of the Task Force if they felt as though there was anything specific that should be addressed.

Win Frazier-Mentioned that there was a resident, specifically a doctor, who stated that the City is a cesspool. He questioned where this accusation would have originated from. He also mentioned that there were comments made about the trees on the former Gordon Elementary site and asked if that could be elaborated on.

Mr. Hofmann stated that he thought the term used by the doctor was actually "radioactive," and that he didn't have any information on where that would have derived from. He also stated that he wasn't sure that he understood the concern regarding the trees on the Gordon Elementary School site.

Mr. Sanford mentioned that he thought that the resident was referring to the fact that trees can help to prevent flooding because they drink a lot of water.

Council Member Montague pointed out that there had recently been many discussions about the loss of trees on that site due to the re-build of Bellaire High School.

Mr. Andrews agreed that, in theory, a tree's leaves do collect water, and any vegetation that is present does slow the water down from entering the City's system.

Menny Rosenbaum-Mentioned that the water that a tree drinks will not help with flooding due to the fact that it is drinking the water that is stored roughly 30 feet below the surface.

Mr. Hofmann explained that ultimately, what is happening on the former Gordon site will have a beneficial impact on creating pervious cover because HISD will be replacing a building with open space. Since that time, HISD has informed the City that they will need to continue using it for Kolter Elementary for a few more years.

Menny Rosenbaum-Mentioned that during the flood, he noticed that the water in the backyard was draining through the pool backflow pipes. He asked if a study has ever been done to see if the sewer system in Bellaire is collapsed just from all of the backwash going through it. Mr. Rosenbaum stated that he took a pair of old jeans and shot them down the pipe and after the water receded, he went back to the side of his house where he found about 25 yards of debris accumulated there trying to get into the pipe. He mentioned that he had spoken with some of the pool companies who stated that there were major problems after the flood, and that some of his clients' sewer systems clogged up due to all of the backwash. Mr. Rosenbaum explained that they are four inch pipes that are currently being installed within inches of natural grade, and suggested that maybe the City should consider raising them 2 or three feet off the ground.

Mr. Andrews stated that he made a good point.

Mr. Leech agreed that the key is to keep the debris out. He added that an overflow of water in the pipes can be handled, but the debris is what becomes problematic.

Council Member Montague mentioned that all downspouts are required to be connected to the storm drains in an effort to prevent sheet flow, which supercharges the system. He stated that now that the City is requiring elevated houses with detention underneath maybe it is time to change that requirement.

Mr. Andrews explained that this requirement came about due to the narrow building lines.

Council Member Montague-Felt that this is no longer a problem due to the fact that fill is no longer allowed and there is natural detention under the houses.

Council Member Pollard-mentioned that the square footage of a swimming pool is not counted in the lot coverage. She stated that she assumes the theory is that the swimming pool will fill up with the rain; however, during events like Harvey, it fills up and then goes way over. Council

Member Pollard stated that she would like to see the regulation changed so that at least a certain percentage of the pool would count towards the lot coverage.

Menny Rosenbaum-Stated that if that was the case, no one in Bellaire would be able to have a pool. He explained that due to the cost of construction, in order to make it cost effective, the lot should be about 1/3 of the price of the total property. He added that this is the market in the City of Houston, not just in Bellaire. Mr. Rosenbaum pointed out that if big homes are not able to be built, the lot will end up being more than 50% of the value of the home. He mentioned that this essentially means that they would be building a tear down. Mr. Rosenbaum suggested that prior to big flood events such as Harvey, the City should send out notification to the property owners with a pool requiring them to lower the water level by several feet.

Council Member Pollard-Felt that this would be a good idea if it could actually be enforced.

Mr. Leech pointed out that some calculations would need to be completed prior to doing this in order to ensure that the water treatment plant would still continue to function properly and not be inundated.

Menny Rosenbaum-Suggested that the cut-off for this to be completed would be the day before.

Mr. Leech agreed that if there was a cut-off point of 24-48 hours before the storm then it could work.

Win Frazier-Stated that this should be part of the communications process.

Mr. Hofmann felt that this would just need to be a general part of the City's overall communications.

Council Member Pollard-Mentioned that a very small amount of residents are signed up to receive the "Notify Me" communications.

Council Member Montague-Informed the public and members of the Task Force that the SSPEED (Severe Storm Prediction, Education, and Evacuation from Disasters) Organization, of which Dr. Bedient with Rice University is a member, has scheduled an Urban Flooding and Infrastructure Conference for February 21-22nd. He asked that this information be shared on the City's website.

Win Frazier-Also mentioned that the Bellaire Business Association is having a discussion on whether or not Harris County could see another Harvey type storm in the future. He stated that it will be on March 6th.

Mr. Hofmann asked if any members of the Task Force had any questions/concerns/comments about the most recent version of the matrix; however, he reiterated that he didn't feel as

though the discussion should be completed until a larger number of members are in attendance.

None of the members had any questions regarding the matrix.

Mr. Hofmann then asked Mr. Cox to put the schedule up on the screen. He also informed the Task Force that this would be Mr. Cox's last meeting, as he is taking a job as the City Administrator for the City of Wimberley. Mr. Hofmann then explained that the next regularly scheduled meeting is on February 20th, at which time staff will have a draft of the front-end narrative documents that will accompany the final report to the Community Rating Service. He mentioned that that time will also need to be carved out to drill into the matrix to make sure that it is worded in a way that the Task Force is happy with. Mr. Hofmann stated that if everything goes as planned, the final action plan will be presented to the City Council on March 19th.

Public Comments:

Helen Ross-She stated that she has attended all but one of the Task Force meetings, during which someone did make a comment that plans had been shelved. She also told the Task Force that she was in fact assured by a member of the City of Bellaire staff that she did not need to worry about flooding due to the fact that their home is 18 inches above the base flood elevation. Ms. Ross mentioned that the purpose of her comments was to say that the Task Force has some great idea, don't shelve them. She stated that she felt as though Mr. Hofmann only gave it a very short acknowledgement.

Mr. Hofmann apologized, and stated that if any employee of the City told her that it would be a mistake on the employee's part.

Beth Laxton, Effie Street- Resident of Southdale for 66 years, and has been through a lot of flooding, but this is the first time that her home has taken on water. She added that she stayed up for days watching the water and saw a lot of what happened. Ms. Laxton stated that she would like to talk to someone with the City about what has been learned.

Mr. Hofmann stated that he would be happy to meet with her, and that he could have other members of staff in attendance as well, if there are specific questions that she has that he would not be able to answer.

Doug Newport-Has been to several of the meetings, but has not heard any real concrete information on how much work has to be done to Cypress Ditch in order to bring it up to capacity as the plan calls for. Do we have to extend the whole thing from S Rice to Chimney Rock? He added that there is a need for increased storage and flow capacity. He then questioned what improvements are being planned in terms of increasing the capacity of storm drains, as well as what the storage requirements are for Cypress Ditch and what the capacity is currently.

Mr. Hofmann stated that some of those questions have been answered, but until more engineering work is done, the answers to other questions are not yet clear. He added that with regard to underground detention improvements/storage, the City Engineer produced a report a couple of years ago that did include calculations which are now being funded and designed. Mr. Hofmann stated that Cypress Ditch would not be the City of Bellaire's project, and at this point there has not been enough engineering work done to determine what is needed.

Mr. Newport asked how the Task Force was going to have a report to City Council in March if those studies have not been completed yet.

Mr. Hofmann explained that although there is a deadline on the report, not all of the answers, engineering, and analysis have to be provided at that time. He added that Council could decide to keep the ball rolling, and continue to evaluate and study.

Mr. Newport asked if there are goals set regarding what needs to be accomplished when.

Mr. Hofmann stated that each action item on the matrix does have a timeline associated with it, and that the work of the Task Force will continue. He added that he can provide Mr. Newport with more information on the local improvements that are planned.

Council Member Pollard-Mentioned that one of the recommendations of the Task Force to Council could be to engage James Andrews to study the benefits of detention with specific emphasis on Cypress Ditch.

Mr. Hofmann agreed, and added that it could also be to create partnerships with the City of Houston and/or Harris County Flood Control District to complete that work.

Mayor Friedberg-Might be helpful to get a reminder of the overview that was given by Mr. Andrews during the first meeting of the Task Force regarding what the finished product looks like. He also mentioned that the deadline for the report derives from the requirements of the Community Rating System, but reiterated that not everything needs to be finalized by March.

Mr. Hofmann explained that the Task Force will continue to meet approximately a few times a year to revisit the plan and continue to decide how to fund the plan as it moves forward. He reiterated that this is a working document for which there will always be more to plan and more to evaluate. Mr. Hofmann also mentioned that by 2021, with the completion of Project Brays, the City of Bellaire will potentially be removed from the 100 year floodplain. He stated that this will be a real game changer for the City of Bellaire and could impact future policy making decisions.

Mayor Friedberg-Mentioned that if the City of Bellaire is taken out of the 100 year floodplain, and the regulations regarding the elevation of homes stays the same, then the residents of Bellaire are even more protected from future flood events.

Council Member Pat McLaughlan-He looks at this a little bit differently; he sees that there are two distinctly different flooding issues that need to be addresses independently. Council Member McLaughlan mentioned that the first is “nuisance flooding,” which he considers to be flooding that is caused by localized rainwater collection, and the other issue is Brays Bayou. He felt as though the City can deal with localized flooding by installing improved drainage and by some effort of controlling the water that is dumped into the City from the surrounding areas. He suggested that there are small, but valuable things that can be done today to help alleviate future flooding, such as, removing the fence on Baldwin and clearing the ditch on the west side of the railroad tracks. Council Member McLaughlan stated that there are no clear cut solutions for the Bayou right now, and that it can really only be addressed to the City’s benefit through regional, cooperative, and federal funding.

Mr. Newport mentioned that the improvements done to Brays Bayou will be irrelevant if another 500 year storm comes through the City. He pointed out that there have been three or four 100 year flood events within the past few years, and stated that the term “100 year flood” is a fallacy.

Mr. Hofmann acknowledged that the calculation used to determine a “100 year flood” will most likely change.

Council Member Pollard-Mentioned that during an event, and once there is about a half of an inch of water across town, the City should inform residents to slightly raise their garage doors to avoid damage from the water pressure.

Mr. Hofmann thanked the members of the Task Force that were in attendance and stated that staff would do their best to have a full committee in attendance for the next meeting.

