

City of Bellaire
Floodplain Mitigation Task Force
Meeting Notes
February 20, 2018

Mr. Hofmann welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the members of the Task Force for being in attendance. He explained that the time has come to make some real progress on the matrix. Mr. Hofmann stated that staff has identified the areas where they feel consensus has not been reached by the Task Force, as well as some other areas where there are concerns about feasibility and the implementation of the suggestions. He added that Ms. Sampson and Mr. Andrews will be taking the Task Force through each of those items to allow for discussion in order to determine whether they need to be kept, deleted or revised. Mr. Hofmann mentioned that the heart of the meeting will be dedicated to finalizing the matrix and ensuring that everyone is on the same page.

Ms. Sampson began the review of the matrix.

Line # 15: Action/Implementation Plan: “Evaluate the feasibility of adding more flood-hardened rain and flood stage gauges at strategic location in the City, to provide for better flood forecasting.”

Millie Hast-Good idea, but wasn’t added by her so she can’t elaborate on the reasoning behind it.

David Roylance-Also was not responsible for this comment, but felt that one idea behind it was public awareness, as well as to gain a better idea of where to stage vehicles. Other than those two things, it was more of a question as to whether or not the City has sufficient information to be able to plan adequately.

Millie Hast-Suggested that this be listed under item 14, dealing with overland flow, rather than 15, which deals with Brays Bayou. She mentioned that there are only two places where flooding is measured and they are not located in Bellaire. She stated that if the concern is more about heavy rain events and not just Brays Bayou then it would make more sense to add this within overland flow.

Jonathan Reichel-Agreed that it may need to be listed in a different place.

Brian Sanford-Asked if there is anything within the major storm drains that measure whether they are to capacity. He stated that would be more beneficial.

City Engineer, James Andrews-No physical gauges in the storm sewer system

Menny Rosenbaum-Install gauges on the street poles that indicates the level of the flood. He added that doing so could potentially save lives.

Mr. Andrews stated that this could definitely be done, and that installing gauges on the streets makes a lot more sense. He stated that he felt as though this item has been cleared up.

David Roylance-If dealing with public awareness, it might need to go into the category dealing with communications.

Michael Ling-Stated that he isn't sure that there is a need for additional gauges within the City if they are already present.

Menny Rosenbaum-Explained that the gauges that he is suggesting are not currently present. He added that they would be visible on the streets throughout Bellaire to try and keep people from driving through the high water.

Michael Ling-Felt that would be a great idea.

Win Frazier-Felt that a consensus had been made that the focus should be on flood stage gauges, rather than both rain and flood stage gauges. He agreed that he is not sure that it should be in line item 15.

Line #15- Action/Implementation Plan:

"Evaluate the development of a levee along the south side of Bellaire, which would prevent water from Brays Bayou from entering the City."

Mr. Andrews stated that from an engineering perspective, this is not the wisest flood control mitigation.

Millie Hast-There is nothing in the plan which addresses Cypress Ditch. She stated that she understands that it is not located within Bellaire, but something should be done to address the southern side of City. Should we partner with Houston to improve and take advantage of Cypress Ditch?

Mr. Andrews mentioned that Cypress Ditch is actually in the plan on line #20.

Millie Hast-Would like to suggest that this language be replaced with something along the lines of "partner with the City of Houston to address the southern border of Bellaire with regard to Cypress Ditch and any other potential drainage opportunities that may exist." She added that Cypress Ditch is not included in item 20, only Kilmarnock.

Jonathan Reichek-Agreed with Mr. Andrews that the idea of the levee is not feasible.

Mayor Friedberg-Hydrologically speaking, does it make any difference if it is on the southern border?

Mr. Andrews agreed that there is no hydrologic benefit in focusing on the south.

Line # 18: Action/Implementation Plan:

"Develop a plan to repair and replace the highly critical local drainage systems within five (5) years. If necessary, issue debt instruments every five years until the major local flood mitigation CIPs are completed. "

Mr. Andrews explained that the Bonds for Better Bellaire 2016 (BBB16) is taking care of 15 major streets within the City, which is requiring a significant amount of funding and time.

Yana Kristal-Asked if the question is whether or not to continue the bond program, or if it was more to determine the scope of work.

Mr. Andrews stated that the bond program absolutely needs to be continued.

Council Member Montague-Explained that in his opinion, the line item is stating that the initiative needs to be escalated.

Mr. Andrews agreed that the difference is that this line item is specifying that this should be completed within 5 years.

Robyn Rosenblatt-Are there things that have been deemed highly critical, since Harvey, that are not scheduled?

Mr. Andrews stated that the only thing that is not scheduled at this point is future partnering projects that are bigger than Bellaire. He added that further study needs to be done in that area.

Millie Hast-Maybe the wording should be worked on a little bit, but doesn't feel that it should be taken out completely. Maybe 5 years isn't feasible.

Robyn Rosenblatt-Felt like this item is saying, "in a perfect world, let's do all of it right now" as much as everyone wants that, it's not feasible. She suggested that it state something along the lines of "continue to explore all sources of inter-governmental partnership in order to expedite the project."

Ms. Sampson stated that Ms. Rosenblatt's suggested language is more of a goal than an action item that a deadline can be assigned to.

Mr. Hofmann suggested that the implementation of the goal mentioned by Ms. Rosenblatt would be to aggressively and expeditiously pursue annual updates to the Capital Plan. Felt that some language can be created in order to capture the Task Force's idea.

Line #23-Action/Implementation Plan:

"Evaluate the installation of a separate storm water drainage culverts for Bellaire only, in addition to existing storm water drainage culverts that carry drainage for Bellaire and Houston both. "

Ms. Sampson stated that staff is not sure how to isolate culverts just for the City of Bellaire.

Mr. Andrews explained that that idea of isolating culverts is not feasible.

Brian Sanford-Could it simply be a typo in the item? He added that the item does mentions both Houston and Bellaire.

Mr. Andrews stated that it could be.

David Roylance-How does the City increase its profile on a regional context if it is already at max? Should we say that the goal is that we are going to take a regional perspective and we are asking staff and the City Council to investigate that and come up with the right answer?

Mr. Hofmann stated that he doesn't know what that math looks like yet, however, the City of Bellaire has been in communication with the City of Houston, and the City Engineer and the Public Works Department also have relationships with their regional partners.

Council Member Montague-mentioned that during a recent meeting with Marvin Odum, it was recognized that there is not the interconnectivity between the smaller entities within the Houston area and that he was going to do what he could to create a forum in order to open up those discussions. He felt that the job of Council is coming up with a way to make it more visible.

Mr. Hofmann stated that maybe there should be something added to the matrix regarding how to make it more visible and tangible. He added that this could be depicted graphically and publically.

David Roylance-Intention was not to detract from the great work that the City is doing. He added that he was just wondering if there are opportunities to enhance or even alter the conversation by potentially setting an arbitrary goal. Mr. Roylance's request would be to consider putting a few conversations out there to reflect the fact that the City doesn't want to rely solely on bond funding.

Mr. Hofmann stated that Mr. Andrews has put together some estimates and those have been communicated to the governor's office. He added that he also knows that the rule will require a 25% local match and that it needs to be reflective of who benefits. Mr. Hofmann stated that the objectives can be along the lines of getting every penny of that that the City can and that the regional participation of the funding of the local match be effectively tied to an assessment of what local entities benefit. He stated that staff can draft some language for that in the next version of the matrix.

Mayor Friedberg-Agreed that anywhere that there is the opportunity to quantify in a tangible way it should be done.

Mr. Andrews pointed out that Cypress Ditch is talked about in Line 17 of the matrix.

Line # 24-Action/Implementation Plan:
"Evaluate the provision of storm shelters in Bellaire"

Millie Hast-She mentioned making residents go so far away for shelter is not practical. She felt that there should be at least one shelter in Bellaire.

Fire Chief Darryl Anderson-Sheltering south of 1-10 for hurricanes is frowned upon because you eventually end up in a flood position like the City of Bellaire was in and then have to move people from one place to another. The goal behind sheltering is to identify a place that is out of the hazard area; somewhere where those individuals can stay until the threat is gone. He added that animals are also allowed at the shelters. Chief Anderson stated that it is not about convenience, but simply about saving lives.

Robyn Rosenblatt-Mentioned that most people in Bellaire simply wanted to get to a point of higher ground and collect themselves in order to come up with a plan. She added that terminology in this case is very important. She asked if there is another term other than shelter for a designated place that would allow individuals to come for a shorter amount of time. Ms. Rosenblatt stated that she feels as though most people would agree that Bellaire is not the place for a long term shelter.

Chief Anderson explained that the place that Ms. Rosenblatt is describing would be called a refuge of last resort. He added that currently Crosspoint Church is the only one in Bellaire. He added that it needs to be determined what is expected of the City of Bellaire when it comes to refuges of last resort.

Menny Rosenbaum-Felt that the idea of having a shelter in the City of Bellaire is unreasonable.

The majority of the Task Force agreed with Mr. Rosenbaum.

Ms. Sampson stated that this language would be removed from the matrix.

Line #28-Action/Implementation Plan:

“Evaluate the provision of grants to homeowners for newer houses (1988-2001) that flooded only once to elevate their homes. These homes are not eligible for FEMA grants, but are not teardowns.”

Ms. Sampson asked for clarification on where this funding would be coming from, if not from FEMA.

Millie Hast-The governor has announced a billion dollar program. She added that other cities have grant programs where they have done fundraising, and that there are a variety of outside agencies where funding could be sought.

Ms. Sampson stated that adding “outside agencies” may better clarify the intentions. Traditionally, a home that flooded one time is not a viable candidate for grants.

Yana Kristal-She stated that this is getting into such a subjective area. How will it be determined which houses will get the funding? She felt that it is better to receive funding that will benefit larger groups of people.

Menny Rosenbaum-Felt that it should not be the City’s responsibility to help pay for a home that has flooded one time in the last 30 years. Felt that it should be removed from the matrix.

Jonathan Reichel-Would be okay with the idea of getting help from third parties, but agreed that the City of Bellaire should not be responsible for funding this initiative.

Ms. Sampson explained that it will be struck from the matrix; however, a summary of the conversation will be included in the narrative to explain what was discussed, and the fact that the Task Force felt that it was not the route they wanted to take.

Line #31-Action/Implementation Plan:

“Review and revise the prioritization methods used to address problem flooding, combining multiple approaches that would include risk and event-based, as well as individual property damage and clustered property damage.”

Ms. Sampson stated that she wasn’t sure if this was supposed to go in infrastructure or if these are measures that are supposed to be used when determining a structure substantially damaged.

Win Frazier-Felt that it would be the latter.

Ms. Sampson stated that in that case, this can be removed because it is already captured in the language above.

Mayor Friedberg-Wouldn't the timing mentioned in the first action/implementation plan for line #31 be driven by the adoption of the flood maps?

Ms. Sampson stated that she believes the time frame of 5 years refers to the next update to the plan.

Mayor Friedberg-Stated that he is anticipating that the City would react to the completion of Project Brays and/or Harvey driven data, and would expect that the City shouldn't just wait for the next meeting of the Task Force.

Win Frazier-Mentioned that some of these comments were written in November and since that time there have been 4 or 5 meetings. He stated that now the Task Force is fine tuning those comments, which shows that this is on course to do the things that we want it to do.

Line # 30-Mitigation Options/Goal:

"Adjust the Community Rating System (CRS) to a non-cumulative approach to the 50% rule."

Ms. Sampson then briefly explained the cumulative approach that has been suggested. She stated that the cumulative rule would be applied to flood related damage sustained by structures only after two separate flood occasions.

Robyn Rosenblatt-What is the City's philosophical interest in preventing people from spending their own money or FEMA money from repairing their home?

Ms. Sampson stated that it is dealing with a public safety issue. She also explained that homes with repetitive losses will have a negative impact on the City's CRS rating.

Mr. Hofmann added that it is the City's way of gaining compliance, and avoiding significant amounts of money being put into homes with repetitive losses.

Robyn Rosenblatt-She felt that residents who live in higher priced homes with more expensive appliances and flooring will be at a disadvantage with the amount of money that it will take to get the house back to what it was at prior to the flood. She added that she feels as though this is essentially "marking a house," which could bring the retail value of the home down because that next owner is going to have to worry about how many repairs have been done on the home.

Mr. Hofmann reminded the Task Force that if the home is built one foot above Base Flood Elevation then it is compliant, and the cumulative approach does not apply.

Robyn Rosenblatt-Is there a window of time for when the flooding occurs? Obviously there is more of a problem with a home that has flooded twice within the last 5 or 10 years than there is with one that has not flooded as frequently.

Mr. Hofmann stated that the Task Force can recommend a window of time.

Ms. Sampson stated that a timeframe of 10 years could be added. She mentioned that she believes that a 10 year timeframe is actually included in the cumulative regulatory language.

Brian Sanford-Felt that the proposed cumulative approach is much better than what is in place now, and that removing residential remodel from it is a really important distinction. He added that putting a timeframe of 10 years does make sense, and adding a provision for severe repetitive loss is also important.

Michael Ling-Does whether or not the City uses a cumulative approach impact the CRS? Not a huge fan of the cumulative approach, but does feel that this one is better than what is currently in place.

Members of the Task Force explained that it does impact the CRS a small amount.

Mayor Friedberg-Asked that the Task Force articulate, when the plan is taken to Council, why they are putting a 10 year timeframe on the cumulative approach.

Win Frazier-How is the Task Force going to articulate why the 10 year timeframe is being placed? Are there other entities that use a timeframe of 10 years as their standard?

Brian Sanford-Believed that Houston uses a timeframe of 10 years.

Mr. Hofmann stated that the next meeting of the Task Force is scheduled for Tuesday, March 6th. He added that staff will have a final document prepared that will be sent out to the Task Force prior to the meeting. Mr. Hofmann urged all of the members to also continue looking at the narrative that was previously provided to them and to let staff know as soon as possible if they have any concerns regarding the document. He explained that on March 6th, the objective will be to finish the review of the matrix. Mr. Hofmann stated that a tour of the Brays Project has been scheduled with Gary Zika, of the Harris County Flood Control District. He stated that members of the Task Force are encouraged to attend and that staff would be sending out more information in the upcoming days via email. Mr. Hofmann asked that the members please RSVP to the email so that they can adequately plan.

Mayor Friedberg-Informed the Task Force that the Bellaire Business Association is also holding an event on March 6th, featuring a speaker from the Harris County Flood Control District. He stated that anyone planning to attend that event must RSVP as well.

Public Comments:

Doug Newport, 4820 Spruce-Stated that it has been interesting, fun, and scary going through all of this information, and that the task force is doing a really great job. He mentioned that even if the City of Bellaire designs its streets to 100 year, but Brays Bayou doesn't, then the water still has nowhere to flow. Mr. Newport stated that we have to get to a place where the City is effectively coordinating with the surrounding entities, and suggested taking the money that the City is planning on spending on its drainage improvements and giving it to the Harris County Flood Control District to build a bigger/more efficient drainage facility. He mentioned that a channel could be designed to drain and get rid of a lot of water that comes into Brays. Mr. Newport informed the Task Force that weeds are growing very high in Cypress Creek and that he can't get away with not mowing his own yard, so why isn't anything being done to that property to open it up and make it a big ditch just like the rest of it. He thanked the Task Force for letting him speak and for all that they have done.

Ronnie Burns, 4439 Jim West-Felt that the Task Force has a lot of good ideas, but stated that the reality of the situation is that it all has to go to Brays Bayou. He doesn't want to give residents a false feeling of hope that the City is going to take care of flooding by doing everything that was discussed; when the fact is that the City doesn't have control over what is upstream from it. Mr. Burns stated that the City of Bellaire is going to have to live with flooding. He then asked if the City would no longer use the cumulative method if it is taken out of the 100 year floodplain.

Mr. Hofmann confirmed that the City would no longer use the cumulative method, assuming that no other regulatory changes are made.

Mr. Hofmann then ended the meeting by thanking the members of the Task Force and the public.