

LOOK UPSTREAM

APRIL 2004

Look Upstream, a series of monthly articles provide information on flooding in the Cypress Creek Watershed and Harris County. These explain what we have learned about what has not been done and what is being done and/or should be done to reverse the direction of escalating flood dangers to neighborhood communities and homes.

Two organizations, the Metropolitan Organization (TMO) and Houston Voters Against Flooding (HVAF) have become a catalyst in obtaining commitments concerning flood issues from local politicians. These apparent commitments, if carried out, will be positive steps toward stormwater flood damage reduction. But the details behind the scene are murky. CCFCC is researching new developments as they occur.

Living up to pre-election commitments made to these organizations, Mayor Bill White in March publicly announced his plan to not only implement stricter stormwater runoff regulations in the City of Houston but also extend these regulations out into Houston's areas of extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ). An important regulation which has been under the public and professional engineering microscopes is one which controls the rate at which stormwater is released from detention ponds into the Harris County drainage ditches, channels and bayous. Mayor Bill White announced on March 15 that the City of Houston detention outflow rate will be reduced to 0.5 cubic feet per second per acre (cfs / acre) on an interim basis until findings and recommendations are received from a technical consulting source that is independent of the City of Houston, Harris County and Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD).

Harris County Judge Robert Eckels has announced he will support Mayor White's plan subject to Commissioners Court approval of funding for the study. More information on this development is provided in the Houston Chronicle March 15th article, *Stricter flood rules may reach past city limits*. This is posted in the "News" section of the CCFCC web site www.ccfcc.org.

The current runoff rate from detention in new land development areas permitted by Harris County Flood Control District is 1.25 cfs / acre. This has become a contentious issue as to how effective it has been in the last 20 years since implementation in 1984. The issue has been blurred by HCFCD officials claims that flooding in Harris County has not been increasing. Urban development has continued at a relentless pace causing increased runoff by covering permeable grasslands and forests with asphalt and concrete. (See the February issue of *Look Upstream* for more information about the release rate). We are told the HCFCD regulatory rate is 10 times greater than allowed by Fort Bend and Brazoria Counties. CCFCC shares the opinion of TMO, HVAF, other organizations and many professional engineers that this lower release rate in the neighboring counties provides their residents greater protection and far less flooding than is the case in Harris County.

In December 2003 CCFCC requested HCFCD to reduce the outflow release rate specified in their regulations to the 0.125 cfs / acre required in Fort Bend and Brazoria Counties and provided a technical report backing up this request. CCFCC also submitted a resolution to the Task Force, Harris County

Flood Control, asking the Task Force to endorse the lower rate and to recommend it to both HCFCD and Commissioners Court for adoption. For reasons not explained to CCFCC or the general public, the Task Force did not accept this recommendation and instead passed a resolution seemingly endorsing the 1.25 cfs / acre regulatory design criteria specified by HCFCD in their draft of a new manual in which the release rate remains as it has been for the last 20 years; i.e. 10 times greater than the 2 neighboring counties

Concluding the City's ETJ regulatory authority and announced policy may take precedence over the HCFCD less stringent regulation, CCFCC made a decision to work in developing a net-work of well respected organizations and community leaders united in a cooperative effort for the purpose of obtaining a commitment from both Commissioner Steve Radack and Commissioner Jerry Eversole to vote for funding of the independent study. Such approval, if voted by a majority of Commissioners Court will hopefully allow the commitments already made by Mayor Bill White, the City of Houston Drainage & Flood Committee and Judge Robert Eckels to become a reality.

This is a major opportunity for the City of Houston and Harris County to join forces in protecting the safety of residents and their property

Look Upstream articles are provided to your neighborhood newsletter editor by CCFCC as a public service. Questions will be welcomed at all times.

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