

community organizations united for collaboration in regional government watershed management...

LOOK UPSTREAM

SEPTEMBER 2007

SNAPSHOTS: STAY TUNED FOR MORE INFORMATION.

Are you a property owner in Northwestern Harris County? Major changes in land use in the upper regions of the Cypress Creek watershed have many ramifications of which downstream residents should be aware. This vast area in Northwestern Harris and Waller Counties is and will continue to undergo transformation from forest and pasture land to concrete covered subdivisions and shopping centers as thousands of new homes are built for Houston's burgeoning population explosion (at the top of the nation's list of fastest growing metropolitan areas).

You may not be aware you have a major vested interest in ongoing urban development / storm water flooding initiatives. These are highly interrelated elements involving risk assessment, damage reduction plans, family safety issues and preservation of forested floodplains for the dual purpose of floodwater conveyance and quality-of-life nature preserves / parks interlinking neighborhoods by pedestrian trails. What does this do to the value of your home, typically the largest of all family financial investments? Have the community leaders in your subdivision developed effective, every-day communications / action planning with Harris County, Waller County and Texas State representatives on such matters?

The Cypress Creek Flood Control Coalition (CCFCC) is a well-organized, growing grass-roots group of concerned residents who came together 8 years ago to establish public representation in government circles on these matters. It functions through a 9-member board of directors elected by the municipal utility districts, home owner / property owner associations, and business firms located in subdivisions throughout the length of the Cypress Creek Watershed who are voting members of this alliance. The following matters are high on their agenda going into the latter part of 2007:

- *The Northwest Corridor (SH 290 and Hempstead Road) Expansion Program.* Currently in the design phase, this project is now recognized among authorities in the Houston metro-area as being the greatest challenge in highway/toll road / light rail transportation projects. It also has immense storm water drainage ramifications; especially in terms of what is done in the "Upper Watershed" areas which will effect

the extent of storm water flooding in the "Lower Watershed" (the 25-mile length in the area between the confluence of Cypress Creek / Spring Creek and upstream to the U.S. 290 bridge crossing. Ground will not be broken for construction before 2011. The alliance has fortunately established working partnerships to ensure a place at the table to look after your interests. *Stay tuned for future developments.*

- *"No Adverse Impact" study.* A management principle known as **No Adverse Impact (NAI)** was developed in the early 2000s by professional flood management engineering experts working together on a national basis as members of the Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM). They state, "the purpose is to address the shortcomings of the typical local floodplain management program. Rather than depending on minimum requirements of federal or state programs, NAI provides tools for communities to provide a higher level of protection for their citizens and to prevent increased flooding now and in the future". CCFCC recently awarded a contract for an NAI-based evaluation in the Cypress Creek Watershed which is being performed by graduate engineering students under the leadership of Dr. Philip B. Bedient, Herman Brown Professor of Engineering, Rice University. Dr. Bedient is actively involved in hydrologic analysis for flood prediction and warning and recently developed a real-time flood alert system for the Texas Medical Center. *Stay tuned for more information in future Look Upstream articles.*

Note: Legislation signed in May 2007 by Governor Rick Perry has made Rice University home to Texas' first research center focused exclusively on predicting and planning for disasters caused by hurricanes and tropical storms.

- *FEMA Flood Maps.* The purpose of flood maps is to show which property in a community is subject to flooding, the expected flood levels and the different risks within the flooded areas. "This information is essential for a community to be able to reduce the risk to

new and rebuilt structures and to protect itself from damage to its infrastructure and from community liability". (Source: [No Adverse Impact, A Toolkit For Common Sense Floodplain Management](#), ASFPM, 2003).

New maps for the Cypress Creek Watershed produced last year under the FEMA map modernization program were found by CCFCC to require "recalibration" to correct errors in the accuracy of the FEMA computer program calculations which underestimated floodplain areas. Action by HCFCD to correct this deficiency is now in its 2nd year. Nevertheless, although having been notified of the problems and participating in agreement on how to correct them, FEMA made the deficient maps effective beginning June 18, 2007. Separately, a federal court is now acting upon a lawsuit filed by the Sierra Club seeking to prevent new development allowed under permit regulations insufficient for addressing the full public interests in this matter because of the map deficiencies. *Stay tuned for more information in future articles.*

- *Harris County Bond Referendum.* Acquisition of land for flood mitigation / parks is essential in order to implement many of the solutions to problems arising from the above issues. Funding which will allow our local government to do this must be obtained by Harris County sale of bonds; bonds which will first require taxpayer vote and approval. Several other entities have requested Commissioners Court to approve major financial commitments for their special needs; all of which exceed well over \$1 billion dollars. CCFCC's request to Judge Emmett was put before Commissioners Court and received a favorable decision to not lump all the proposed projects into a single line item but to provide the voters with the choice of approving or disapproving each of 6 line items each on their own merit. *Stay tuned for more information in the October issue of Look Upstream.*

Look Upstream articles are provided by the Cypress Creek Flood Control Coalition, an all-volunteer, 501(c) (3) organization as a public service. Visit their website, www.ccfcc.org for more information on flood insurance, flood protection planning, environmental preservation and membership. If your community is not a member, ask them to join.

