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Wharton Journal-Spectator

NEWS SOURCE FOR WHARTON, TEXAS

Funding secured for flood study

By **RONALD K. SANDERS**

- The federal budget now includes \$1.5 million for federal flood control studies in the Lower Colorado River basin, including Wharton.

It wasn't always that way. President Bush's original blueprint called for just \$600,000. A lobbying effort changed that, though.

"We decided to make an assault on Washington, D.C.," Domingo Montalvo told the Wharton Economic Development Corp. board Tuesday.

As chairman of the Colorado Valley Floodplain Coalition, he was among the lobbying team that went to Washington last week. Accompanying him were Wes Birdwell and Missy Mandell of the Lower Colorado River Authority.

Plus, "we had a few angels who did not want to be named."

Montalvo, who is also a Wharton City Council member, had hoped for \$1 million, at most.

"We did not get \$1 million. We got \$1.5 million," he told WEDCO directors.

Because of the higher figure, Wharton and other flood control studies in the basin were fully funded, he said.

"There are not too many increases in the federal budget," Montalvo said.

The so-called Wharton Interim Feasibility Study is being conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Wharton joined its study with LCRA's basin-wide flood investigation, which is separately funded through the Corps.

The Wharton study began last year. On March 24, Corps officials will give city officials a progress update. A set of





subsequent hearings will be scheduled for public comment.

At some point Corps officials will present a series of options for major flood control projects for Wharton. Much of the computer modeling already is done.

City manager Andres Garza Jr. serves on the study's steering committee. He said he is hopeful the options could be coupled with Riverfront Park improvements.

"Nothing is ruled out," Garza told the Journal-Spectator.

I.O. Coleman Jr., a WEDCO board member and head of the Wharton Chamber of Commerce's river access committee, has been advocating new boat access to the river, and eventually, a low-water dam.

WEDCO and the Wharton City Council, however, have thus far declined to provide matching funds to pay a consultant to design the park plan. The council turned it down by a 4-3 vote last week.

Some have suggested the park plan should wait until at least a preliminary idea can be gained of what flood control measures will be advocated in the Corps and LCRA study.

Also last week, Garza briefed Corps officials about a dozen flood control studies the city is pursuing independent of the Corps. Among them will be a new north-side ditch to drain the Ahldag Addition.

These independent projects will increase the city's stormwater outflow downstream into major arteries such as Boughmann Slough and the San Bernard River. But those streams are already badly clogged and the additional city water could be a problem downstream.

Efforts are underway to add the San Bernard River to the Corps study.

Its poor condition was among the subjects of a commissioners court drainage workshop held last Friday. Birdwell, who heads LCRA's river management, said he remains hopeful of the Bernard's inclusion.

The Wharton study is estimated to cost \$1.03 million.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will provide \$515,000 of it. The remainder is the city's responsibility.

However, the city has received help with its share. The Texas Water Development Board has awarded the city a \$250,000 grant. The WEDCO board and the commissioners court is contributing portions of the remaining \$265,000.

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