

Wharton Journal-Spectator

NEWS SOURCE FOR WHARTON, TEXAS

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Federal flood study launched

By **RONALD K. SANDERS**

- After two days of rain, what better time to start studying drainage?

Local, state and federal officials Tuesday kicked off a two-year study to determine the feasibility of controlling flooding on the Colorado River, Caney Creek and Baughman Slough.

First, they established the project team at city hall, then went out in the field to actually look at the areas, so damp and swollen from rainfall. Their so-called field reconnaissance concludes today.

“What we are talking about are the true problems,” said John McLeod, a Lower Colorado River Authority engineer who is the liaison between the city of Wharton and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Corps is actually conducting the so-called Interim Feasibility Study at a cost of \$1 million.

The federal government is paying half. The city is responsible for the other half,



City and county officials discuss local drainage concerns at city hall. At noon Tuesday, the city's streets and drainage committee met. An hour later was another meeting to kick off a federal flood control feasibility study. Clockwise from left are Beautification Commission member Doc Barfield, who is a former city councilman, Precinct 4 Commissioner Jimmy Kainer, Councilman Don Mueller, and Precinct 2 Commissioner Chris King. Among others present were County Judge Lawrence Naiser and Precinct 1 Commissioner Mickey Reynolds.



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though contributions have been made by the Texas Water Development Board, Wharton County and the Wharton Economic Development Corp.

But the kick-off did not begin upbeat.

Questions were raised why the study is even needed, and what the city and county will actually get out of it.

“For a half a million dollars, we can get a lot of drainage (improvements) done now,” said former Precinct 1 Commissioner Carl Nichols.

At the end of the study, the corps will list several solutions to drainage issues, and how they match up to a federal formula for costs against benefits. The benefits must outweigh the costs to qualify for the actual federal construction funds.

Solutions could include dikes or dams. If the San Bernard River turns out to be part of the problem, the study would expand to include that, McLeod said.

His comments came during a meeting of the city council’s streets and drainage committee, held one hour before the actual kick-off session.

At issue at the earlier meeting was whether routine maintenance is more important than studies. The city council is considering a local engineering study of new drainage projects, outside the scope of the federal study.

Mayor Garland Novosad, District 1 Councilman V.L. Wiley Jr. and District 2 Councilman Darryl Darnell suggested the city hasn’t performed the maintenance it should have.

“We’ve had no maintenance,” Darnell said.

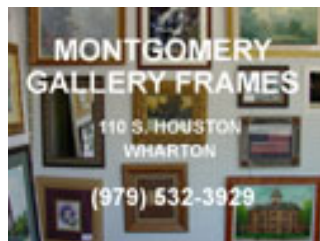
Andres Garza Jr., the city manager, however, said resources are limited by just an eight member staff already working hard.

But Darnell said the street department lacks of supervision and does not get enough actual work done. He said he watched them take a 45 minute break and a long lunch while replacing a culvert in front of his house. It took all day to put it in, though the crew quit early, he said.

“It is hard to swallow that we are short of manpower when it takes a full day to set one culvert.”

At Novosad’s urging, Garza will develop a list and cost estimate of all the routine drainage needs in the city and deliver it to the city council within 30 days. Novosad urges borrowing money and contracting it out.

The maintenance issues need to be on the “fast track,” Novosad said.





Garza will take projects that may need engineering, such as a proposed extension of the north ditch at the Ahldag Addition, back to the streets and drainage committee on Friday.

Also at issue is what should get the higher priority — clearing out clogged outfalls in the county or routine maintenance inside the city. All three county commissioners whose precincts include part of Wharton were present, as was the county judge.

Garza thinks downstream blockage needs greater attention.

“When you look at area drainage for the city, you also have to look at areas outside the city where the outfall is.”

District 4 Councilman Don Mueller agrees.

“We have to have a place for the water to go.”

Mueller asked the county commissioners for relief and asked everyone to support the creation of a countywide drainage district.

Lots of road and bridge taxes are paid inside the city, he said, and although county precinct crews are working on their priorities, the city has bigger priority because people flooded here.

“Everybody is going to have to help each other.”

Attending the meeting were county commissioners Mickey Reynolds, Chris King and Jimmy Kainer, as well as County Judge Lawrence Naiser. City officials received from them a pledge of assistance.

Reynolds said if an engineering study says Baughman Slough needs cleaning, then that work will become a top priority. Currently, his crews are cleaning Jarvis Creek.

“Yes, we can work with the city,” Reynolds said. “We will rearrange our schedule” if engineering studies demonstrate a need.

King said if an engineering study recommends a new ditch for Ahldag Addition, his staff will assist and can act with a two-week notice.

But, he cautioned, “it has to be something that works.”

Some consideration has been given to diverting stream flow from the San Bernard system to the Colorado River.

But the natural drainage in Wharton County is to the northeast, said Walter Garrett, with the soil conservation service.

He said any attempt to deviate from that “invites trouble.”

“I’m sure Mother Nature had her reasons.”

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