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VOTE YES

SINK OR SWIM

Support Proposition A because there's no plan B

By Joe B. Allen and Jim Blackburn



Melissa Phillip / Staff photographer

Rescue boats line Tidwell at the east Sam Houston Tollway after Hurricane Harvey. Voting for Proposition A will wrap on the storm's one-year anniversary.

For decades, the two of us have represented different sides of our region's development — one representing developers and utility districts and the other representing environmental and neighborhood groups. Hurricane Harvey caused us to have a conversation, and we found agreement on many important flood-related issues.

We agree that flooding is the single largest issue facing the Houston region. It threatens our lives, property, economy and future as one of the great metropolitan areas of the world.

Proposition A — the proposal to allow Harris County to issue \$2.5 billion in flood control bonds — will be on the ballot in Harris County on Aug. 21, the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Harvey. We agree that this bond issue is essential to the future of our community.

We have entered a new era in flood mitigation — one that requires big and bold solutions. We commend Judge Ed Emmett and the Commissioner Court for calling the \$2.5 billion bond election. It is especially important that they included the following provisions in the Order Calling the Bond Election:



Brett Coomer / Staff photographer file photo

A Spring neighborhood is inundated by Hurricane Harvey last August. Funds from a proposed \$2.5 billion bond issue would be used for flood control.

1. Public meetings to obtain input for selection of the projects to be funded with bond proceeds;
2. Public hearings for design of the projects to be funded with bond proceeds; and
3. Equitable distribution of projects across the county.

Harris County Flood Control District is holding hearings in each of the 22 watersheds around the county. It is asking all of us to share our concerns, ideas and opinions about the projects to be funded with the bond proceeds. HCFCFD has developed a website (www.hcfcfd.org/bond-program) with information about the watershed meetings, possible projects, interactive maps and methods for providing input. We should all participate and let them know our viewpoints and ideas.

For decades, we have underfunded drainage and flood management, and that must change. HCFCFD currently attempts to maintain 2,500 miles of channels on a \$60 million annual budget. Its capital improvements budget is also \$60 million per year. Compare that to transportation spending in Harris County where the combined Texas Department of Transportation, METRO, Harris County Toll Road Authority, Harris County and others average in excess of \$1 billion per year.

However, it is drainage and flooding that most threatens our future.

With the passage of \$2.5 billion in bonds and an estimated \$1 billion in matching federal funds, HCFCFD would be able to spend \$1 billion per year for the next 10 years on flood management. This will not solve all of our drainage problems, but it would represent a dramatic improvement.



The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has announced funding for four federally approved and permitted projects: Brays Bayou, Clear Creek, Hunting Bayou and White Oak Bayou. All four projects have a significant local match requirement. If the bonds are approved, these projects could start immediately. Planning, public input and permitting should continue on other watersheds, as long-term drainage improvements are a generational challenge.

As a community, we must understand that there is no way to completely eliminate flooding. We can only minimize its impact. There are high-risk areas adjacent to bayous and creeks that cannot be protected by currently available federal and local funding, even with the bond issue. These high-risk areas can only be protected by buyouts that remove families from harm's way while providing the land area needed for retention ponds and drainage channels. Many of these homes have flooded three or four times. Buyouts should be a high priority there.

The private sector needs to be mobilized to address replacement housing for the homes to be bought-out. We need the creativity of the best planners, architects, engineers, builders, developers, academics and nonprofits from our region to develop an innovative housing redevelopment program as part of this effort.

There is no Plan B. Either this bond election passes or the current flooding conditions continue. The world watched as we came together to help one another in the aftermath of Harvey. Now is the time to come together to show the world that we are willing and able to solve major problems to ensure the long-term success of the place we proudly call home.

We plan to vote FOR Prop. A, and we urge you to do the same. Early voting begins Aug. 8. Election Day is Saturday, Aug. 25. For more information, go to harrisvotes.com.

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