



Watershed Protection Development Review

US Corps of Engineers-Onion Creek Flood Hazard Reduction, Ecosystem Restoration and Recreation Improvements Project November 2007

Background

Significant floods occurred in the lower Onion Creek watershed in October 1998 and November 2001. Citizen reports and staff field reconnaissance indicated that over 100 houses flooded in 1998 and over 400 in 2001. In the Onion Creek watershed near the intersection of South Pleasant Valley Road and East William Cannon Drive there are over 700 houses subject to inundation by the 100-year floodplain. For the 100-year flood, house interior inundation depth ranges up to 10 feet in the Onion Creek study area.

In response to citizen concerns about the significant flood hazard risk in the Onion Creek watershed, the City Council passed a resolution in February 1998 authorizing the City Manager to enter into an agreement with the US Army Corps of Engineers for study services to identify flood hazard mitigation and ecosystem restoration alternatives with Federal funding interest for project implementation. *The major advantage of engaging the Corps of Engineers is Federal cost share funding potential for project implementation.* The Federal cost share for project implementation is up to 65 percent, which provides significant economic leveraging of City funds.

With the assistance of Congressman Lloyd Doggett in securing the initial Federal funding, study activities were initiated in January 1999. Study activities were 50%/50% Local-Federal cost shared. Additionally, Travis County, the City of Sunset Valley, the City of Wharton and the LCRA were partners in the regional Lower Colorado River Basin study. In 2003, The Texas Water Development Board provided \$400,000 in grant funding to support a portion of the local cost.

Project Summary

The Corps has completed the technical, environmental and economic feasibility analysis of flood hazard mitigation and ecosystem restoration alternatives for the study area. This information is summarized in the Corps' Interim Feasibility and Integrated Environmental Assessment Report. The report findings and project recommendations were approved by the Corp's Civil Works Review Board. On December 31, 2006 the Corps issued formal recommendation that the project be presented to Congress for Authorization.

For the Onion Creek study area, a buyout alternative was recommended for Congressional Authorization. The proposal consists of the buyout/removal of 410 houses (25-year floodplain) with nominal City/Federal 35%/65% cost participation. The acquired properties will be converted for multi-purpose uses—park, greenbelt and include ecosystem restoration. City cost share funding up to \$28,000,000 for project implementation was approved in the City's November 2006 Bond Election.

Congressional Action-Water Resources Development Act 2007 (H.R. 1495)

The Water Resourced Development Act (WRDA) was approved on November 8, 2007 authorizing Corps project implementation and providing special credit language for previous City expenditures for floodplain buyouts

1. **Inclusion of *Project Authorization in WRDA 2007***-This action allows future Congressional funding appropriations of up to \$46,000,000 for property buyouts, park facility installation and ecosystem restoration. Congressional authorization was the major project hurdle for successful project implementation. Now that WRDA has been approved, project implementation can proceed.
2. **Inclusion of specific credit language in WRDA 2007**-This ensures that the City receives credit for previous expenditures of over \$4,000,000 to purchase flood prone houses in the project area. Since the City purchased houses prior to initiation of the Corp's Feasibility Study phase of the project, specific congressional legislation was required for the credit to be allowed.

Project Implementation Costs

Federal	\$45,891,000
City	\$25,550,000
Total	\$71,441,000

Schedule

The project design phase will begin in early 2008. Implementation can begin in FY2009.