Tracy Gee Community Center
Charting Buffalo Meeting Location

City of Houston Plans to Cut Down Forest for Detention Basins

The greatest short-term threat to the forest actually comes from The City of Houston, Public Works and Engineering. Harris County Flood Control District ("HCFCD") gets the attention with its Charting Buffalo study, but the City of Houston has targeted the forest for numerous detention basins. Here's the background.

On May 17, 2011, Carol Haddock P.E., Senior Assistant Director, Planning and Development Services Division, of the Public Works and Engineering ("PWE") department of the City spoke at a Council Meeting of the Briar Forest Super Neighborhood. Ms. Haddock indicated the City wanted to "mitigate" additional storm water drainage flow into Buffalo Bayou and was seeking about 110 acre feet of detention on the south bank of Buffalo Bayou between Beltway 8 and Wilcrest. Ms. Haddock indicated that the City has the funding in place for their plan and expected to start excavation in January of 2013.

On December 15, 2011 at a Charting Buffalo "Leadership Briefing" HCFCD officials advised there was currently no funding from the County for new detention basins along the banks of Buffalo Bayou between Beltway 8 and Highway 6, but that the City had funding for its project. The City of Houston has approximately $8 million earmarked for this project, "Buffalo Bayou Detention Basin and Erosion Control", WBS Number: M-000261-0001-3.

The City seems to insist that the detention basins be built in this area even in the face of community opposition and opposition from Harris County Precinct 3 Commissioner Steve Radack, a long-term champion of the Harris County park system. Commissioner Radack in a letter, dated November 4, 2011, to a City Councilman regarding the City's proposed detention basins project on the southern bank of Buffalo Bayou between Wilcrest and Beltway 8, wrote the following:

"I see absolutely no reason for Harris County to participate in some City initiated fast-track approach to build detention on Buffalo Bayou. I would suggest you and other City leaders find solutions to the City's detention problems using other methods based upon sound engineering principles to manage storm water without expecting Harris County to completely ravage the banks of Buffalo Bayou.

Again, I suggest that you seek other methods and other locations for the detention the City is demanding the County provide, detention needed to mitigate the impacts of proposed city drainage projects."

Nonetheless, in a letter dated November 7, 2011 to a resident of the Briar Forest Super Neighborhood, Ms. Haddock wrote, in part:

"The Charting Buffalo efforts incorporate an existing HCFCD plan to construct linear detention along both banks of Buffalo Bayou throughout Terry Hershey Park. PWE has reviewed the HCFCD plan, specifically the area between Wilcrest and Beltway 8, as a potential location for detention as mitigation. PWE has requested approval from HCFCD to use this area. If approved, any detention within this reach [of Buffalo Bayou] would be designed and constructed in accordance with HCFCD requirements, including Charting Buffalo."

PWE has had plans to construct detention basins along Buffalo Bayou for years. They are simply waiting for Charting Buffalo to approve their designs. The City is intent on decimating this forest, making no effort to preserve it.

The Renew Houston fund (which includes the "drainage fee" or "rain tax") is expected to bring in between $5 and $8 billion over the next two decades. Some of these funds could be used to acquire properties for detention basins which <u>do not</u> involve deforestation and do involve a regional approach to flooding.

We encourage you to write to City officials to indicate your strong interest in having the City select alternative sites (non-forested) for their detention basin needs.

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