



STUDY STAKEHOLDER GROUP (SSG) MEETING NOTES

Tuesday, December 9, 2008 at 2 pm
HCFCD Offices, 9900 Northwest Freeway, RM 100
Version 1/5/2009

Introductions and Welcome

Jennifer Dyke welcomed the group. Stakeholders, Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD) staff and consultants from AECOM, Civil Tech and Elmore Public Relations introduced themselves. Wayne Crull, former (and original) senior study manager, introduced himself and thanked new stakeholders for being involved, as this study would not be possible without community participation and input. Dyke confirmed all new stakeholders received a study binder. Dyke then launched a presentation for new stakeholders about the Buffalo Bayou and Lower White Oak Bayou Federal Flood Damage Reduction and Ecosystem Restoration Study background.

HCFCD Background & Mission Statement

Dyke reviewed the HCFCD's background. The original role of the organization, which was created in 1937, was to serve as the local partner for major projects with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE). Since then, HCFCD's role has become increasingly complex and many other facets of reducing flood risks in Harris County have come into play.

The mission of the HCFCD is to provide flood damage reduction projects that work, with appropriate regard for community and natural values. HCFCD accomplishes its mission by (1) devising the flood damage reductions plans; (2) implementing the plans; and (3) maintaining the infrastructure.

Study Partners

Federal legislation, Section 211(f) of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996, enables HCFCD to take the lead on the planning, design and construction of specific flood damage reduction projects in cooperation with the USACE.

The Buffalo Bayou and Lower White Oak Bayou Federal Flood Damage Reduction and Ecosystem Restoration Study was initiated in September 2005 in partnership with the USACE. Overall, a plan is expected to be identified by 2012, although the process to obtain federal approval and funding may take longer.

The HCFCD is the local sponsor for this study and the USACE is the federal sponsor. HCFCD will comply with all the laws and regulations pertaining to a federal study, including compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

Working with the USACE on a federal study enables HCFCD to share in the cost of the study. Upon completion of the study and approval by the USACE, HCFCD will be reimbursed by the USACE for the federal share of the study costs. This is approximately 50% of the study costs.

If the study recommends a project that is approved by the USACE, upon completion of approved components within the overall project, HCFCD can be reimbursed by the federal government for approximately 50% of the design and construction costs.

Dyke reviewed a map featuring active and completed USACE projects and studies.

Study Area

The study area encompasses Buffalo Bayou from Barker Reservoir eastward through downtown Houston to the Houston Ship Channel Turning Basin, a distance of about 32 miles. Additionally, the study area extends along White Oak Bayou north and west from downtown Houston to Loop 610, a distance of about 7 miles. Most of the study area is within the city of Houston.

Dyke reviewed a map featuring the Buffalo Bayou and Lower White Oak Bayou Floodplains.

Study Area Problems

Study area problems include flooding and the degraded natural environment along Buffalo Bayou and lower White Oak Bayou.

Study Purpose

The purpose of the study is to investigate flood damage reduction and ecosystem restoration components and identify a plan that has public support and is competitive for federal funding.

HCFCD utilizes a number of components to reduce damages due to flooding. Several components that will be considered as part of this study include:

- Stormwater detention basins
- Channel modifications
- Relocations
- Bypass channels
- Bridge improvements

The purpose of an ecosystem restoration project is to restore portions of the study area environment that have degraded along the channels.

Examples of ecosystem restoration components include:

- Plantings of trees and vegetation
- Creation of tide marshes
- Restoration of wetlands



- Reconnection of oxbows

Because HCFCD's primarily role is flood damage reduction, the organization must identify a partner for an ecosystem restoration project.

Study Process

Because this is a federal study, the federal study process, which is lengthy, must also be followed.

The study is currently ending the first phase where the existing conditions were documented and analyzed by collecting hydrology and hydraulic, engineering, economic, real estate and environmental data. Data collection focused on the 500-year floodplain. This information will be used to compare and contrast components in the next study phase, Component Identification and Evaluation.

During the Component Identification and Evaluation phase, HCFCD will identify and evaluate components for flood damage reduction and ecosystem restoration.

Major study milestones such as the Feasibility Scoping Meeting (FSM) and Alternative Formulation Briefing were discussed. After components are identified and evaluated, a FSM will be held between the HCFCD and USACE Headquarters, District and Division to review the study findings to date and obtain USACE buy-in to move forward.

In all phases of the study process, HCFCD encourages public involvement and communicates updates to the public on the study progress.

Study Stakeholder Group (SSG) Members

The SSG is currently composed of environmental and quality of life groups, local governmental officials, businesses and area residents. The stakeholder group was formed in late 2005. The group began with around 6 stakeholders, who had worked with HCFCD on other studies. Since that time, the group has expanded to around 40 stakeholders. The initial stakeholder group was small because the initial work to collect & document available information about the study area did not provide much opportunity for stakeholder input.

As the study moves forward into the next phase, HCFCD wanted to expand the stakeholder group to have more involvement identifying potential components and plans. The SSG usually meets 2-4 times each year, sometimes more or less, depending on the study phase. HCFCD also encourages the stakeholders to inform their organization or neighborhood about the study and bring back input they hear about the study.

Goals, Objectives and Constraints

Study goals and objectives were developed by HCFCD with input from the USACE and stakeholders. These will be used to evaluate components and select a plan. As defined, goals are broad statements.



Study goals include:

- Conduct the necessary engineering, economic and environmental studies in a timely manner to evaluate flood damage reduction, ecosystem restoration and enhancements and recreation measures along Buffalo Bayou and lower White Oak Bayou.
- Identify a viable project that is acceptable to the public, local sponsors and the USACE.
- Select a plan that is competitive for federal funding.
- Outside the selected federal plan, identify and prioritize viable alternatives for flood damage reduction and environmental enhancements that could be locally funded.

To support the study goals, eight objectives were developed:

Flood Damage Reduction Objectives

- Reduce damages due to riverine flooding along Buffalo Bayou and lower White Oak Bayou.
- Identify a plan that reasonably maximizes the net economic benefits for the purpose of flood damage reduction.
- Develop flood damage components that enhance or complement the environment where possible.

Ecosystem Restoration Objectives

- Identify and evaluate opportunities for ecosystem restoration.
- Identify and evaluate opportunities for environmental enhancements.

Recreation Objective

- Identify and evaluate opportunities to improve the aesthetics and recreational features, such as hike and bike trails, and the resulting economic benefits along Buffalo Bayou and lower White Oak Bayou.

General Objectives

- Strive to preserve cultural resources and plan to minimize and mitigate unavoidable adverse impacts to these resources.
- Strive to identify and form partnerships with other entities to participate in this study.

Study constraints include:

- The project should be limited to the study area defined by the Buffalo Bayou watershed and the White Oak Bayou watershed downstream of IH 610 (lower White Oak Bayou).
- Modifications to channels should be limited to the main stems of Buffalo Bayou and lower White Oak Bayou.



- The flood damage reduction portion of the project must conform to the mission of the HCFCD and be implemented by the HCFCD under existing laws, ordinances and policies.
- The project should not increase water surface elevations in any location.
- An ecosystem restoration plan must have a local sponsor with the authority and funding to implement the plan. If no local sponsor is identified, HCFCD can only participate in an ecosystem restoration plan if plan features are integral with flood damage reduction and conform to the mission of HCFCD and can be implemented by the HCFCD under existing laws, ordinances and policies.

Without Project Conditions Report

The report is in draft form now. The study team has collected feedback from USACE and HCFCD's Engineering Review Board and is addressing these comments. The draft report is available for review at HCFCD . Contact Jennifer Dyke to schedule a time.

2007 Public Meeting

Two identical public meetings were held in November, 2007 to raise awareness of the study and collect public comments related to the study. Approximately 300 people attended the two meetings and more than 80 comments were submitted as part of the public record that ended on December 20, 2007.

Some of the public meeting comments included:

- general support of a flood damage reduction and ecosystem restoration projects
- thoughts about development increasing flooding
- questions about project location
- concerns about erosion
- questions about environmental impact
- concerns about channel maintenance
- general support of recreational amenities

The comments received at the public meeting and during the comment period have been documented as a part of the official public record and can be reviewed by contacting Jennifer Dyke to schedule a time. The public meeting transcripts are available on the study website.

Questions & Comments

Question: Developing a federal flood damage reduction plan that stands a good chance of receiving federal funding seems like a very competitive process. What are you up against?

Answer: There is limited funding for both flood damage reduction and ecosystem plans and HCFCD is competing nationally against other states. In addition to the many criteria the USACE reviews, the USACE considers studies with a benefit cost ratio of 3.0 or



higher to have a good chance of receiving funding. There are around 55 different factors the USACE uses to score a project.

Question: During Ecosystem Restoration, HCFCD cannot be a sponsor. Explain why.

Answer: Unless it directly relates to HCFCD's mission of providing flood damage reduction projects, then HCFCD cannot fund an Ecosystem Restoration project. If the Ecosystem Restoration components do not directly relate to flood damage reduction, an Ecosystem Restoration sponsor needs to be identified to carry the Ecosystem Restoration components forward into the plan formulation phase.

During the Component Identification and Evaluation phase, HCFCD will identify potential Ecosystem Restoration components. These will be screened to ensure they are feasible and meet study goals and objectives before component evaluation occurs. Once evaluated, the best scoring Ecosystem Restoration components will be identified.

During this process, HCFCD will look for an Ecosystem Restoration sponsor to formally commit to funding a potential Ecosystem Restoration project. If a sponsor is not identified and the ecosystem restoration components do not directly relate to flood damage reduction, Ecosystem Restoration may be dropped from the study. If Ecosystem Restoration is dropped from the study, HCFCD will still consider environmentally friendly components in a potential project, such the creation of wetlands in stormwater detention basins and the planting of trees along channels.

It is also important to note that an Ecosystem Restoration project has a different cost share than a flood damage reduction project. The federal share is 65% and the local sponsor share is 35%. This is in contrast to the flood damage reduction cost share of around 50/50.

Wrap Up

Dyke reviewed the stakeholder binder materials with attendees.

Meeting notes will be distributed soon after the meeting and attendees will have one week to provide input. Once corrections are made, the meeting summary will be emailed and posted to the web site.

Next Meeting

Dyke explained that the HCFCD conference room is no longer large enough to accommodate the SSG group, so future meetings may be held at the AECOM office, located at 5757 Woodway.

The group generally meets two to four times per year. The next meeting will be held during the first quarter of 2009. Stay tuned for details.

