



## *Lake Houston Area Grassroots Flood Prevention Initiative*

February 25, 2019

Hon. Lina Hidalgo  
Harris County Judge  
1001 Preston, Suite 911  
Houston, TX 77002

RE: Prioritization of 2018 Bond  
Program Implementation

Judge Hidalgo,

The purpose of this letter is to voice serious concerns on behalf of the Lake Houston Area Grassroots Flood Prevention Initiative (LHAGFPI) on the Draft Prioritizing the Implementation of Harris County Flood Control District 2018 Bond Projects.

We understand a Draft proposal of this plan is to be presented to the County Commissioners at the March 12 Commissioners Meeting for consideration.

We strongly encourage you to **delay any formal action on project prioritization** until the methodology can be further refined and calibrated in a process that provides inclusion of greater inputs from citizens, businesses and the scientific community.

According to the Draft document distributed by HCFCD at a February 19 “stakeholders” meeting, “HCFCD strives to complete projects that can help the most people first (worst first approach).”

Our Group enthusiastically endorses this approach.

However, after further review of the Draft document, we feel there are serious flaws in metricizes and criteria forming the basis of this proposal that will prohibit a “worst first” prioritization.

We also would like to state any of our comments appearing critical of the Draft document are by no means an attempt to disparage HCFCD Deputy Executive Director Matt Zeve or any other member of the HCFCD Staff. Rather, we empathize with how difficult a task this must be for HCFCD as to our knowledge there are no existing examples of any governmental entity ever attempting and completing such an exercise. This demonstrates this is a task that cannot be quickly and easily accomplished.

A few readily apparent deficiencies in the Draft are:

- Failure to appropriately recognize benefits from multi-million dollar partnership matching grants
- Failure to capture full flooding impacts and full project benefits by not considering commercial property, schools, hospitals, and senior-care facilities
- Not recognizing benefits to LMI areas received from projects executed in non-LMI areas
- Not considering Costs/benefits of pre-Harvey Capital Improvement Projects
- Lack of inclusion of URGENT NEED criteria in the matrix

Just as importantly, the high degree of transparency and community involvement that has been the hallmark of the County since it began developing the 2018 Bond Package has been absent from this process.

Due to the degree of complexity required in developing an approach that ensures achievement of the stated goals and to allow **ALL** stakeholders to have input in the process, a patient, thoughtful and deliberate approach is essential. What heretofore appears to be a “rush to judgment” should not be allowed to occur.

Our Group—as well as the residents of the entire Lake Houston Area—resoundingly supported the Bond Program. The foundation of that support was a trust built upon the spirit of transparency and inclusion Harris County demonstrated during the crafting of the proposal.

Prior to the bond election, HCFCD held 23 Information and Community Engagement meetings to gather public input and ideas, and to answer questions about the Bond Program.

The meeting held in Kingwood had by far the largest attendance of any of the Community Meetings—700 individuals. This constituted 18% of the attendance total of all meetings combined. Additionally, between May 30 and August 3, HCFCD solicited Community Input Comments. Of the total 2,400 comments received by HCFCD, 840 (37%) were related to the San Jacinto Watershed

However, it now appears that spirit of transparency has disappeared. Now that the County is attempting to derive a process to prioritize the implementation of the 2018 Bond Projects, to our knowledge, only two “stakeholder” meetings were held to discuss how these projects will be prioritized over the next ten years to “deliver the maximum flood damage reduction benefits” to Harris County citizens.

Those two meetings were confined to a small number of invited attendees. Fortunately, our Group found out about the second meeting—and had the good fortune to obtain an invite to that February 19 meeting—or we would be as in the dark as the rest of the residents of Harris County.

Thousands of Lake Houston Area single-family homes were flooded during Hurricane Harvey, as were numerous apartment complexes, senior citizen facilities, Kingwood High School, Lake Houston YMCA and major commercial structures—including all the commercial buildings beginning with Kingwood Town Center heading south to the San Jacinto River as well as much of the commercial area along HWY 59 in Humble.

The Lake Houston Area pays approximately \$100,000,000 in property taxes to Harris County (this is County entities only—not schools, cities or junior colleges) annually. Failure to adequately address the identified flood mitigation projects included in the Bond package will result in significant declines in the market value of the Area’s residential and commercial properties and thus a drop in future County tax revenues. The \$2.5 Billion in bond projects are totally funded by property taxes.

Judge Hidalgo, for over three months—since right after the election—we have been unsuccessfully attempting to schedule a brief face-to-face meeting with you to discuss our Area’s unique flood prevention and mitigation issues. Sadly, our last request on January 28 has failed to generate any formal response from you or your office on scheduling the requested meeting.

While it is very disappointing you have not been willing to meet with us, it is even more discouraging you have not chosen to hold a public meeting in our Area to explain your position regarding the changing of the “ground rules” for Bond Project prioritization standards—a change that has blindsided a Community that trusted the County would carry through with its promises of fairness and transparency enough to give the Bond an almost 90% approval at the polls last August. The Lake Houston Area voters also turned out almost three times the percentage of its registered voters than that of the overall County in the election.

Again, our Group would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you personally. Also, we urge you to tour the Lake Houston Area so you can see first hand the post-Harvey sedimentation impacts to both the West and East Forks of the San Jacinto River as well as damages to our residential and commercial properties. LHAGFPI would be happy to host you at your convenience.

Since Hurricane Harvey, LHAGFPI feels we have had a very positive relationship with Harris County officials—and in particular the HCFCD Staff—and would like the opportunity to collaborate on project prioritization and any other flood prevention matters.

Sincerely,

Lake Houston Area Grassroots Flood Prevention Initiative Steering Committee:

Dianne Lansden

William M. Fowler

Fran Barack

William L. McCabe

Cc: Harris County Commissioner Rodney Ellis  
Harris County Commissioner Adrian Garcia  
Harris County Commissioner Steve Radack  
Harris County Commissioner R. Jack Cagle  
HCFCD Deputy Executive Director Matt Zeve, P.E.  
Harris County Flood Control Policy Advisor, Gabe Baker