



February 27, 2019

Dear Legislators,

We're writing to address the concerns which have arisen on the heels of an inaccurate media report that aired late last week on FOX 26.

Since the story posted, we have received a series of complaints that rely on the inaccurate reporting, and we want to correct the record because this is an issue of grave importance to so many Harris County residents.

Let us start with this unequivocal truth: every project on the 2018 Flood Bond project list will be completed. The Harris County Commissioners Court has been clear in its instructions to the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD): complete every project as quickly as possible. During yesterday's meeting of Commissioners Court, we and HCFCD re-asserted our commitment to complete every project on the bond list, as has always been planned. We invite you to watch the official exchange at: <http://harriscountytexas.swagit.com/play/02262019-830> under Item 1, minute 20:08.

In the spirit of transparency and because we recognize the fears that may have been stoked by the misleading report, we would like to provide you with an overall look at our flood control project effort.

As you know, the 2018 Bond Program passed with more than 85% of the vote on August 25, 2018. In developing the Bond Program proposal, Commissioners Court increased the total dollar amount of the bond from the initial proposal to \$2.5 billion, in order to allow the County to pay the required local match for federal projects and have hundreds of millions of dollars available for projects that would never qualify for federal funding. The \$2.5 billion bond program was approved by voters.

As part of the directive to complete all Flood Bond projects as quickly as possible, HCFCD and partner County departments have been hiring additional staff, retaining outside firms for additional capacity, and securing more office space to house these staff. At yesterday's court, the court again tasked HCFCD with exploring any and all avenues to accelerate the pace of flood control projects while not compromising the care that is required.

We are currently operating at full capacity, even with the increased staff, support staff, and office space. Notwithstanding this fast pace and growth, we are not able to complete \$2.5 billion (plus billions in federal matching funds) worth of work simultaneously. Currently, the county is moving on projects in partnership with the federal government which have the federal government's authorization to proceed and other projects that were already underway when the bond passed.



As these projects progress, more space will become available for HCFCD to take on additional Flood Bond projects. As with any capital improvement project, and in the spirit of transparency, we must be able to demonstrate the order in which we are completing projects. The court requested that HCFCD create a process - Equity Guidelines - to determine the order of projects that have not yet been started, which are currently being held in no order whatsoever. Since we are operating at full capacity, no project is being stalled or halted by the process of determining the order of projects not yet started.

The general consensus is that we must address the hardest-hit areas first. It is important to us that we demonstrate how “worst first” is calculated. That is the process HCFCD is developing with stakeholders. This does not mean that projects will be eliminated or “bumped.” Every project will be completed as quickly as possible. No project will be “bumped” since projects not yet started are not currently arranged in any particular order.

It’s here where we would like to correct the record distorted by the Fox26 report. The report falsely claimed, “With billions of federal and local dollars flowing into flood protection, a new Harris County regime is proposing new procedures and criteria which could impact how and where that money will be spent.” To be clear, the procedures are being drafted for the first time. There is currently no order to projects not yet started, and we owe it to the community to have a process for an order and a clear order. To imply an existing process is being subverted is entirely erroneous. Additionally, it is false to state that the Equity Guidelines would impact how and where that money will be spent. The only variable the Equity Guidelines will affect is the “when.”

Based on conversations with stakeholders, HCFCD’s current draft contains eight potential criteria to comprise the Equity Guidelines which will score projects that have not begun.

1. **Existing conditions drainage level of service:** Projects in areas that flood repetitively should receive higher weight.
2. **Flood Risk Reduction:** How many people can we remove from the floodplain?
3. **Potential for Multiple Benefits:** Can we use the space for recreational or environmental benefit as well as flood mitigation?
4. **Project Efficiency:** What is the total cost of the project divided by the number of structures benefitted? Can we accomplish flood risk reduction for fewer dollars, either through partnership or other cost savings?
5. **Long Term Maintenance Costs:** Can we maintain the project after completion or would we have to plan for additional maintenance costs?



6. **Minimize Environmental Impacts:** Does a project raise additional environmental concerns or is it self-mitigating?
7. **Lack of Service:** Has a project been completed in the previous 10 years? Has it been over 10 years?
8. **Partnership Funding:** Is a project funded through partnerships?

Hurricane Harvey was an unprecedented storm that upended thousands of lives across our community. It is an emotional issue and an enormous challenge we do not take lightly. Thank you for your attention to this matter. We welcome any additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lina Hidalgo".

Lina Hidalgo  
Harris County Judge

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russ Poppe".

Russ Poppe  
Executive Director, Harris County Flood Control District



**FAQ:**

**Is Harris County going to cancel my project?** No, every project on the Flood Bond project list will be completed.

**Is my project being bumped behind another project?** No, there is no set order for projects that have not yet begun. We are developing a process to order projects by “worst first.”

**Is income level going to determine if my project gets done?** No. The draft prioritization guidelines have eight criteria that could determine the implementation schedule for HCFCD Bond Projects that have not yet been initiated. On an earlier draft, one of the eight included consideration of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Low Moderate Income (LMI) data. Based on stakeholder input and expert feedback, HCFCD plans to revise that criterion to remove that consideration. Instead, the criterion will consider only the last time a project was done in that area. HCFCD, based on stakeholder input, finds that lack of service more accurately identifies hardest-hit areas within that criterion.

**How can I provide feedback to Harris County on this process?** HCFCD has held two in-depth meetings with stakeholders, to fine tune the draft Equity Guidelines. HCFCD will convene an additional meeting for stakeholder discussion of the draft guidelines. If you or your office would like to participate, or to send written comments, please email the Russ Poppe [russ.poppe@hcfcd.org](mailto:russ.poppe@hcfcd.org)