

Meeting Summary
H-GAC REGIONAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

RFMC 10/21/2009

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mark Vogler (Fort Bend County); Michael D. Talbott (Harris County); Phil Jones on phone (Montgomery County); Andrew Isbell (Walker County); Monica Martin (Wharton County); Troy Toland on phone (City of Conroe)

Cruz Hernandez (City of Baytown) was represented by Debbie Barnes
Mike Marcotte (City of Houston) was represented by Jamila Johnson
Mark Jordan (Lower Colorado River Authority) was represented by Heidi Carlin
Sarah Metzger (City of Pasadena) was represented by Daya Dayananda
Dale Rudick (City of Sugar Land) was represented by Shashi Kumar

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Frank Rodriguez Jr. (Austin County); Kelly Hamby (Brazoria County); Sidney Lewis (Chambers County); David Collins (Colorado County); Mike Fitzgerald (Galveston County); Louis Bergman (Liberty County); Lisa Krobot (Matagorda County); Yancy Scott (Waller County); Scott Elmer (City of Missouri City); Cathy Dominguez (Brazos River Authority); Blake Kellum (San Jacinto River Authority); Spencer Karr (Trinity River Authority); Scott Hall (Lower Neches Valley Authority);

VACANCIES:

City of Galveston; three "At Large"

H-GAC STAFF PRESENT:

Carl Masterson; Rachel Powers; Erin Livingston; Jeff Taebel; Andrea Tantillo

OTHERS PRESENT:

John Grounds (TFMA); Stephen Reiter (Halff Associates); Robert Knight (Walker County); Burton Johnson (Burton Johnson Engineering); Yu-Chun Su (PBS&J); Paul Mendes (City of Oak Ridge North); Kevin Byal (City of Dickinson)

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

The meeting was called to order at approximately 1:38 PM. Andrew Isbell welcomed the Council, followed by self-introductions.

APPROVAL OF JULY MEETING REPORT

A quorum was not present and so the Council was unable to approve the July meeting notes.

MEMBERSHIP

No changes in membership have occurred since the July meeting.

PRESENTATION ON BUILDING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT

Heidi Carlin presented on the Building Public Support for Floodplain Management guide and workshop developed by the Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM). Heidi gave those present a review of the information covered in the workshop and accompanying guide.

Topics covered in the workshop include:

- Why we build public support;
- How to deal with people face to face;
- How to reach out to the public; and
- How to start an initiative.

Some highlights of the guide include: the top ten general principles of effectively building public support and the idea of the 27/9/3 rule as a guide of how to quickly and efficiently make a point. To be most effective, a message should be presented in 27 words, stated in 9 seconds, with 3 key messages. Everything is very fast paced in the world today and so in order to be heard as floodplain managers we must strive to be succinct.

Heidi also reviewed the four-step method to building public support:

1. Make sure everyone agrees there is a problem;
2. Make sure they agree you are the right people to deal with it;
3. Review approaches that look sensible to all; and
4. Agree that not everyone will be happy, but that the approach selected makes the most sense.

The guide also provides communication pointers such as how to know your audience and work with leaders. Other topics include working with the media and developing a master strategy. The guide provides tips and examples of what other communities have done.

Q: Does the workshop evaluate which outreach programs are best for boosting CRS credits?

A: The guide does mention CRS and gives some information on good projects for earning CRS credits.

REPORT BY H-GAC STAFF

TNRIS Mapping Update

Rachel Powers reminded those present that at the July meeting Melinda Luna, with TNRIS, had asked communities to submit mapping needs. Melinda received only one submission from the region. At this point, TNRIS is moving toward statewide implementation, which will be the next opportunity for communities in the region to submit projects for mapping and special studies. As part of statewide implementation, TNRIS will be rolling out a web tool where communities can enter their needs via the website into the TNRIS database. TNRIS will be sending a letter out within the next few months asking

for communities to declare a representative so that they will be able to get access to the website and submit projects to TNRIS for consideration.

Q: Do you know who they will be sending the letter to?

A: No.

Comment: They should send it to the floodplain managers.

Rachel will check with Melinda and suggest that the letters be sent to the floodplain managers.

Q: When you say mapping are you referring to LIDAR or aerial?

A: Both.

Flood Management Handbook

Erin Livingston provided a brief update on the promotion of the Flood Management Handbook. Erin gave a presentation to about 80 people at the Texas Floodplain Management Association last week. She was happy to report that around 100 CDs of the handbook were taken to the conference and all were picked up before the end of the conference. One individual did mention that they had already used the handbook when explaining a topic to others.

GIS data available on H-GAC website

Erin reported that the most current approved FEMA floodplain boundaries, as of spring 2009, are available on the H-GAC website. A link to the webpage will be sent to all individuals on the RFMC email contact list.

Presentation topic survey

Erin reported she had, on two occasions, sent out a link to a survey where individuals could indicate their preferences in presentation topics for the quarterly RFMC meetings. Ten responses were received and those present were given copies of the survey to complete if they had not yet done so. Survey responses will be used to identify future presentation topics.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION BY MEMBERS

Future Project Selection

Erin Livingston opened the project selection discussion by asking that all present indicate their top three choices from the list of possible future projects for the RFMC mentioned at previous Council meetings.

Possible projects receiving the most votes during the prioritization exercise were as follows:

- Public awareness on flooding (7 votes)
- Legal issues in the floodplain workshop (7 votes)
- Enforcement of floodplain regulations training (5 votes)
- Floodplain regulation primer (5 votes)
- Online inventory of flood/drainage studies, projects, mapping, community regulations, and other flood management activities (5 votes)

Discussion was focused on two primary topics: a legal issues workshop and public awareness efforts. Concerns were voiced regarding the RFMCs ability to undertake the projects without outside support. A workshop would be achievable within the resources H-GAC can put toward a project. However, we need to make sure we do not duplicate an existing workshop/effort.

Legal Workshops

The project will encompass a series of workshops.

- The first will focus on what communities are authorized to regulate when it comes to the floodplain. The intersection of floodplain management and property rights will be addressed. This information is essential when regulations are being developed. Floodplain regulations could be classified as “legal slam dunk,” “pushing the envelope,” and “not for the faint of heart.”

Possible speakers include Ed Thomas, of Michael Baker Corp.; the county attorney used by the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD); and the City of Houston attorney. H-GAC will ask those affiliated with the RFMC for other suggestions. ASFPM has a number of legal papers on their website at www.floods.org and might be able to provide suggestions.

Burton Johnson spoke with Michael Baker, Corp, who said they could make Ed Thomas available at no cost. Ed is from Massachusetts, where they view property rights a bit differently. Ed is knowledgeable about these differences.

The workshop will likely be a half day event and CFM credits will be offered.

- The second would focus on the development of a legal case and prosecution of a floodplain case, geared toward the investigator or code enforcement officer. Cases may be civil or criminal.
- The third workshop would also focus on the development of a legal case and prosecution of a floodplain case, although this workshop would be geared toward prosecutors and judges. The City of Houston is dealing with criminal floodplain cases, and the prosecutors seem to be doing a lot of educating the judges on the severity of the complaints and what the regulations are.

For each workshop, a primer could be developed to provide the information presented. The primer would be posted on the H-GAC website. Other groups that might have an interest in these topics include realtors and developers.

One possible source of funding is the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB). They reportedly received a sizable increase in funds, and this type of project might be of interest to them. When we go to the TWDB we should let them know that the workshops and primers would be beneficial for the whole state, not just this region. We could promote the project idea as a possible pilot project for this issue. The RFMC does have a small budget and some money could be put toward a speaker’s travel budget. Funding the development of primers would be more difficult if only H-GAC funding were available.

H-GAC will write up a summary of the project idea and get it out to everyone to make sure it accurately states what the group has indicated they want. A possible timeline is to have a proposal after January and the workshop in April.

Public Awareness

The region has not experienced a federally-declared disaster due to flooding since 2001. As a result, the public has become complacent. We could pool our resources and look at doing a more powerful public outreach campaign. Public awareness of flood issues would likely lead to increased funding for flood control and drainage infrastructure. We would need to narrow down the information included in the program. Maybe this is also a topic that we would want to do a workshop in and then out of the workshop come up with a project. Because we don't want to duplicate efforts, we should partner with or support other efforts.

Mike Talbott offered that the RFMC could assist in reviewing the content of *Floodwise*, a program being sponsored by HCFCD, the City of Houston, Harris County, and TxDOT. The focus of the program is public education and awareness of flooding issues. The intent is for it to be a regional resource that everyone will be able to plug into. Most of the content has been developed for the initial launch planned for the end of this year and the first quarter of next year. There is some content in draft form that could be ready for review.

Other Announcements

John Grounds reported that RiskMap is underway and FEMA will be having 29 free scoping meetings across the state. These are scheduled for the upcoming week. No counties in the H-GAC region are involved yet.

Rachel Powers reported H-GAC has received requests to host two trainings. The first is the four-day NFIP training. Hopefully we will have a date for that soon. The second is an NFIP agent training for insurance agents and local officials who might be interested in what their insurance agents should be saying. There is a tentative date of April 7, 2010. The trainings will be free.

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting will be January 20, 2009, at 1:30 PM, in Conference Room A of the H-GAC offices.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:53 PM.