

## Flood Control District Projects and Plans

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The Harris County Flood Control District (District) is a special purpose district created by the Texas legislature more than 70 years ago. Its mission is to devise flood damage reduction plans, implement those plans, and maintain the infrastructure. The District strives to provide flood damage reduction projects that work, with appropriate regard for community and natural values.

The District derives its income primarily from a separate ad valorem tax on property in Harris County. It also secures income for projects from partnerships, grants, impact fees, and rents and royalties. That funding is used to pay for operation and maintenance of District facilities, debt service, and capital projects.

The District's 2007 tax rate is 3.106 cents per \$100 valuation. That tax rate is one of four rates set by the District's governing body – Harris County's Commissioners Court. The other rates are for Harris County (39.239 cents), Port of Houston (1.437 cents), and the Harris County Hospital District (19.216 cents). The combined tax rate for these four entities is 62.998 cents per \$100 valuation. This overall tax rate was reduced from the prior year by 1.0 cent by reducing the county's Public Improvement Contribution Fund.

The District's ad valorem tax income pays for the operation and maintenance of the District and its facilities, and to cover debt service on bond sales. The District's Operations & Maintenance budget is about \$104.45 million and pays for the general operation and maintenance of the District and its facilities (salaries, maintenance, channel repairs, buildings, vehicles, etc.).

In addition to the District's base Operations and Maintenance budget, a recommendation was made in December 2007 for Commissioners Court to consider funding a budget supplement of \$14.03 million for an expanded maintenance repair program. The recommendation is made based on a multi-year evaluation of the District's 2,600-mile channel system and regional stormwater detention basins. That evaluation revealed that the maintenance value of the infrastructure is about \$4.7 billion and there are some 28,500 deficiencies valued at \$152 million. The recommended increased funding would allow the deficiencies to be reduced to about \$95 million over 5 years.

The District's debt service relates to bonds that are sold for capital improvement projects. Prior to the early 1990s, the District's capital improvement projects were funded from voter approved bonds and some of that debt still remains. The District was on a pay-as-

you-go basis for its capital improvement program from the early 1990s until 2001. In 2001, the District entered into a “Flood Control Projects Agreement with Harris County” under which the District builds flood damage reduction projects on behalf of the County, and the County agrees to pledge a portion of its tax rate to repay any debt created.

Funding for all District-related flood damage reduction projects from all sources (spent or currently available) has totaled nearly \$1.5 billion in the past 20 years. More than \$1.1 billion of that amount has been provided in just the past seven (7) years. That investment has made a tremendous difference in reducing the damages from several major storm events over that period alone, plus a permanent reduction from future losses. The major projects have also added significant open space suitable for popular multi-objective use.

Examples of major capital projects underway during FY 2008 include stormwater detention basin construction in the Armand, Halls, White Oak, Brays, Hunting, and Greens bayou watersheds. Major channel conveyance construction includes projects on Brays, Sims, Hunting, White Oak, and Berry bayous. Home buyout continues across the county in cooperation with the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The outlook for future funding is good for the operations and maintenance activities of the District. The Capital Improvement Program is well-funded for the current year and partly into the next year due to some grants and Federal project reimbursements. Project spending will begin to tail off rapidly in years 2 and 3 (FYs 2009-10 and 2010-11) and be essentially zero by year four (FY2011-12).

The District has made strong advances in implementing its flood damage reduction program with the funding commitment made by Commissioners Court in 2001. Reliable and predictable annual funding of \$200 million for capital projects is recommended for an aggressive and appropriate program (\$170 million from local funds and \$30 million from partnerships). It is also recommended that the District’s next capital projects funding source and amount be identified and available by the end of FY2008-09 in order to provide continuity in project implementation at an appropriate pace.