

DRAINAGE DISTRICT NO. 6

Drainage projects clearing the way to enhance flood prevention in Jefferson County

By Sharon Brooks
Business Editor

For over two years, Jefferson County Drainage District No. 6 (DD6) has been aggressively pursuing eight grant applications to fully fund various mitigation projects across the District to improve drainage and increase flood control.

Approximately 52% of Jefferson County, including Beaumont, Bevil Oaks, China, Nome, and the communities of Fannett, Northwest Forest, Hillebrandt Acres, Cheek and LaBelle, as well as farm and timber land in between, depend on DD6 to help protect their residents and businesses from flooding, especially during major storm events like Hurricane Harvey and Tropical Storm Imelda. With that in mind, the District is constantly developing new projects to enhance drainage, while prioritizing projects that will produce the greatest benefit. Cost is a large factor for them to consider and securing funding to supplement their tax revenues is vital to DD6 to make as many improvements as possible to divert stormwaters from flood-prone Southeast Texas.

General Manager Dr. Joseph Majdalani explained, "The operations at DD6 are funded through property tax assessments... The estimated tax collections for the 2019-20 budget year (are) approximately \$21 million."

Additional funds are collected through fees from various companies



(mainly pipelines) accessing DD6 lands and earnings from investments. The daily operating revenues described would not provide enough funding for the major capital improvement projects proposed under the FEMA-approved Hazard Mitigation Plan.

"As you can see, the tax rates have remained the same since 2013, yet we're still expanding and providing more maintenance. But, how do we accomplish it? By going after grants," said Dr. Majdalani. "The grants allow us to expand our system and at the same time maintain it."

Since submitting their first Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2005, DD6 has been successful in securing in excess of \$130 million in grants funded through FEMA and distributed through various

entities in Texas.

DD6 currently has an application pending with the Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM) for \$50,000 that will be used to hire a private firm to guide the planning process and development of the District's 5-year Hazard Mitigation Plan Update, which is due on April 26, 2022. The mitigation plan "helps focus and direct money toward projects that will have the greatest benefit on reducing the impact of flooding while continuing to support the areas of growth of new businesses and development," said Majdalani.

"Typically when we apply for a grant, we select the project out of this Hazard Mitigation Plan," unless a more pressing need presents during the five years between plans. Then, the District could choose to apply for a grant to perform a project that addresses the need that has arisen, often necessitated due to a damaging weather event.

Karen J. Stewart, the District's Business Manager said, "The last time we updated the Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2015, we hadn't experienced Harvey and Imelda. We always incorporate the most current data to select and design the most impactful projects to reduce and limit a hazard as best as possible, even if it was not included in the Hazard Mitigation Plan. That's our main goal."

The eight grant-funded capital projects previously mentioned are designed to address problems identified by the District and improve upon existing infrastructure. They are projected to

total \$21,261,984 and are currently in varying stages between grant application and the preconstruction process.

DD6 is the sub-recipient on five projects that are either Hazard Mitigation Grants through TDEM or Flood Mitigation Assistance Grants through the Texas Water Development Board. The five projects total \$17,107,124. Of these projects, three have been awarded and are awaiting a final contract; one is under contract; and one is awaiting official award.

The remaining three projects are with the Texas General Land Office and will utilize Community Development Block Grant Disaster Funds. They are collaborative efforts with Jefferson County listed as the sub-recipient. DD6's projects total \$4,154,860 and will also be 100% funded. The projects are awaiting official award notification.

DD6 is "anxiously awaiting these contracts so that we may commence construction on all the awarded grant projects in 2020, and continue to tackle the flooding, which has affected so many of the local homes and businesses within the District," according to Stewart.

"These eight projects are fully funded by federal and state agencies, without using local tax dollars," Majdalani reminded, and the benefits they provide to the DD6 service area will be invaluable when future storms threaten Southeast Texas.

Byrd Gully Project

Byrd Gully begins at Dishman Road and ends at Pine Island Bayou, serving a large area north of Beaumont that experiences flooding during heavy rain events. This project is designed to improve drainage and mitigate flooding.

The estimated cost is \$711,800.

Taylor's Bayou Project

The Taylor's Bayou Project will improve drainage in an unincorporated area of Jefferson County, eight miles southwest of Beaumont.

"Taylor's Bayou under Highway 124 in the Fannett area is narrow and restricts water flow during flooding. We're going to widen and deepen the bayou to improve drainage in this location," said Majdalani.



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The estimated cost of the project is \$2,500,860.

Elinor Street Project

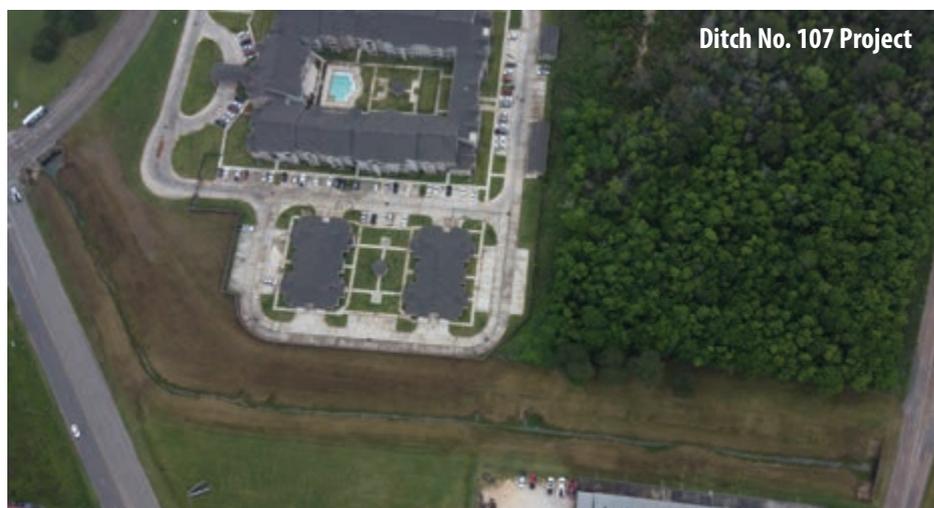
The proposed Elinor Street Project in central Beaumont begins at the intersection of Elinor Street and Eighth Street and ends at DD6's Ditch No. 110 located just north of Washington Boulevard. The flood mitigation project is designed to deliver stormwaters from roadside ditches in the surrounding area to DD6's Ditch No. 110 to alleviate area flooding.

The estimated cost of the project is \$1,493,000.

McLean Street Project

The McLean Street Project is located in the Amelia area, west of Beaumont. It begins at Ney Street and runs along Calhoun Street, ending at the existing Gulf Terrace Detention Basin. The proposed project will address and relieve repetitive shallow home flooding in the area.

The estimated cost of the project is \$4,040,480.



Ditch No. 110-B Project

The proposed Ditch 110-B Project is located in south Beaumont between Seventh and Eighth Streets, north of Washington Boulevard. The improvements proposed in the rehabilitation project will allow for better area drainage and restore the structural integrity of the drainage system.

The estimated cost of this project is \$696,000.

Ditch No. 107 Project

The improvements proposed in

the Ditch 107 Project are located in south Beaumont, between Sarah Street and Cardinal Drive (Highway 69), east of Fannett Road. The proposed project will enhance the drainage system and improve drainage for the surrounding area.

The estimated cost of this project is \$958,000.

The Amelia Cutoff Project

The proposed improvements are located south of Washington Boulevard, east of the LNVA Canal, and

west of I-10 in south Beaumont. The proposed project will enhance the performance of the drainage system and reduce flooding in the area.

The estimated cost of this project is \$4,246,000.

Ditch 609 South China Project

The proposed Ditch 609 improvements are located in the city of China. The proposed project will enhance the performance of the drainage system and reduce flooding in the area.

The estimated cost of this project is \$6,615,544.

The eight projects entail a lot of work, and each has specific improvements engineered to meet the area's needs. The projects will require new bridge construction, improved designs, concrete repairs and replacements, earthen ditch modifications, and numerous other details meant to improve drainage and enhance ease of maintenance. The primary objective of all eight projects is to further DD6's mission, described Dr. Majdalani.

"These projects will assist DD6's efforts in controlling area flooding and improve the performance of the drainage system."



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