

July 21, 2020

Commissioners Court  
Administration Building  
Houston, Texas 77002

Reference: Transmittal of a status report documenting Harris County Flood Control District projects that reduce flood risks in socially vulnerable neighborhoods.

Dear Court Members:

During the Commissioners Court meeting on June 30, 2020, the Harris County Flood Control District (District) was asked to prepare a report to document the status of flood risk reduction projects in socially vulnerable neighborhoods. The attached exhibits and tables illustrate our current, active projects across all of our watersheds with respect to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Social Vulnerable Index (SVI) ratings. It is important to note as part of this transmittal:

- Out of the 145 active bond projects, 57 percent are located in high SVI areas (scores between 0.75 and 1) and 79 percent are located in high or moderately high SVI areas (scores between 0.5 and 1).
- The District is, and has been, executing our projects in compliance with the Prioritization Framework that was adopted by Commissioners Court on August 27, 2019. This framework prioritized the initiation of our projects based on several factors, including SVI.
- Prior to the prioritization framework being adopted and only 1 month after the 2018 Bond Election passed, the District executed an initial contract in the amount of \$712,260 with a consultant to help us accelerate projects within the Halls Bayou watershed. This contract has since been amended to approximately \$47 million, the largest consultant contract in the District's history with a sole purpose to properly plan, accelerate, and execute flood risk reduction projects in the Halls Bayou watershed over the next 7 years.
- A similar approach has been developed and funded in the Cedar Bayou watershed, which also serves areas with high SVI ratings.
- All District bond projects in the Greens and Halls Bayou watersheds have started, with 7 currently in construction at a total value of over \$100 million.

- The District has expended approximately \$40 million in local dollars towards building the Hunting Bayou Federal Flood Risk Reduction Project since we began construction in 2008, despite not receiving any reimbursements from the US Army Corps of Engineers due in large part to a low Benefit-to-Cost Ratio (BCR). This project will positively benefit over 4,400 residential structures primarily in the Kashmere Gardens subdivision. It took funding provided via the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 for the District to secure the necessary funding, at full federal expense, to complete this critical project which is also located in a high SVI area and provides drainage to the Lyndon B. Johnson County Hospital, the state's busiest Level III trauma center.

Some challenges remain as we continue to execute and accelerate flood risk reduction projects across the county, which include:

- Local drainage must be addressed to increase resiliency in many older, higher SVI neighborhoods, which makes partnership projects with the jurisdictions that have authority over local drainage a key component and these have been slow to materialize. Without good local drainage, neighborhoods will still flood after the District increases our channel capacities if the water cannot get to the channels. We are learning that several of the local jurisdictions are reporting funding problems, which may require creative funding solutions for them to participate in these joint projects.
- More rights-of-way are needed along many of our channels and tributaries to create capacity and storage, which in many cases requires the purchase and relocation of homes and businesses. A robust relocation program, including replacement affordable housing, is key to minimizing disruption to affected property owners and impacts how quickly we can implement projects.
- We continue to engage the community to solicit input on projects, and while the COVID pandemic has required us to go virtual on our meetings, we still have better attendance in certain watersheds as compared to watersheds that are in a higher SVI area.
- The District is pursuing multiple grants to help fund projects in high SVI areas, the primary of these is the Community Development Block Grant Mitigation (CDBG-MIT) funding made available from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and administered by the Texas General Land Office (GLO). There is approximately \$4.2 billion in CDBG-MIT funds at the GLO, and in order to maximize the amount of grant funding the District could be awarded from these funds, a lengthy application and approval process is required, which will affect how quickly we can construct projects in high SVI areas.

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- As we implement these flood risk reduction projects in high SVI neighborhoods, there is a concern that gentrification will be accelerated, driving up costs of living and making it more expensive, if not cost prohibitive, for low income residents to remain in their neighborhoods. A collaborative approach needs to be developed to address this concern as part of our comprehensive project approach.
- To date, we have secured approximately \$680 million in partnership funds to support the bond program out of an anticipated amount of \$2.4 billion. We have identified additional sources that have the potential to make available several hundred million more, but there is no guarantee on these funds which means additional funding will likely be needed to help us build all we had originally intended and presented in the 2018 Bond Program.

The challenges listed above will require the support and resources from multiple County departments as well as assistance from community based groups to ensure we have community engagement in these budget and policy related discussions. The right blend of community input to help guide the various County departments involved will help increase the successful implementation of our Bond Program and companion County projects as we espouse a holistic, inclusive, efficient, and equitable approach to achieving resiliency.

Sincerely,

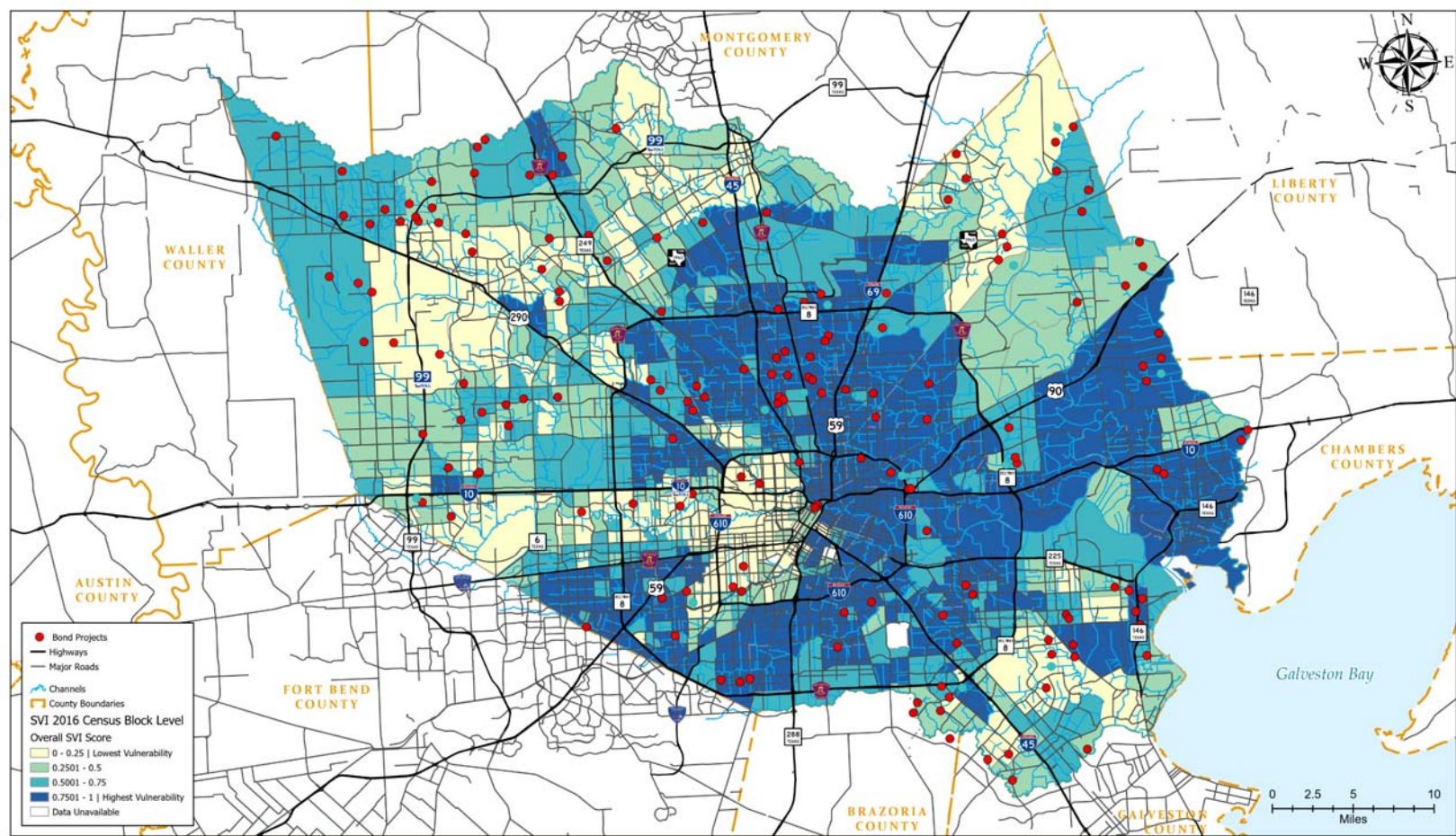
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Russell A. Poppe", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Russell A. Poppe, P.E.  
Executive Director

RP:to

Attachments: Project Status Map and associated tables





# **2018 Active Bond Projects** Shown with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Social Vulnerability Index Census Tract Data Set



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