

BPA SYMPOSIUM

Aligning Politics and Policies to Achieve Long-Term Stormwater Funding

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A Few Basic Fundamentals

- The need for storm water management funding is obvious
 - quantity (flood risk reduction)
 - quality (environmental)
- The Harris County and Houston Community already has comprehensive drainage plans that are utilized as the basis for project identification, prioritization and planning - we know what we need to do on a project-by-project basis (continuous improvement always embraced)
- Over \$2 billion in storm water improvements are readily identified – all that is needed is funding
- Over \$200 million per year is needed to “catch up” or “get ahead of the curve” at the City of Houston alone
- Water quality mandates exist by Federal and State law that require funding – currently no dedicated funding source exists other than ad valorem sources and some transfer from other utilities

Aligning Politics and Policies

- Project Identification and Prioritization
 - Ideally aligned purely with warranted needs
 - Realistically will have political input
- Desired Funding Policies
 - Adequate funding to achieve capital improvement plans
 - Sustainable funding source(s)
 - Fairly applied
 - Easily applied
 - May have a sunset
- Realistic Politics
 - The funding needs tends to “blow-away” our elected officials (need to educate, educate, educate)
 - Fear of political backlash from public
 - Loopholes that protect special interests which dilute funding (the slippery slope of exclusions)

How Can We Get Funding?

- Ad valorem taxes (i.e., increase property taxes)
- Bonds (i.e., increase debt service)
- Water and sewer rates (i.e., increase the water and sewer rates further)
- Federal appropriations (i.e., Corps of Engineers or other agencies)
- Federal and State grants (i.e., FEMA, EPA, and other agencies)
- Dedicated flood management and storm water utility

Funding Options

- Debated the subject for years
- Increasing property taxes and/or debt service is not popular
- Could increase water and sewer rates to cover the costs via a transfer
 - Not popular either
 - Easily subject to future manipulation of funding
 - Is a viable funding source if political will exists
- Federal appropriations and grants are really limited despite popular belief
 - Pulling Federal dollars often sets one local agency against another
 - Benefit /Cost ratios are hard to justify

Some Interesting Facts about Storm Water Utilities

- Houston is the only major city in Texas without a Storm Water Utility – Dallas, Fort Worth, Austin, and San Antonio all have storm water utilities
- Even numerous smaller Texas cities have storm water utilities (i.e., Galveston, Bryan, Abilene, Laredo and Killeen)
- Along the Gulf Coast, Houston is the ONLY major city that does NOT have a storm water utility – New Orleans, Orlando, Tallahassee, Mobile and Biloxi all have such utilities
- Locally, there is a plan in place called Renew Houston that is intended to establish such dedicated funding for streets and drainage improvements

Benefits of a Dedicated Flood Management and Storm Water Utility

- Dedicates funds for flood management and storm water improvements only
- Provides a reliable long-term funding source
- Leverages dollars spent in our neighborhoods to support other improvements to streets, sidewalks, waterlines, and sanitary sewer lines
- Helps preserve property values via needed CIP improvements
- Can have a sunset clause to terminate the utility if desired once we are “caught up”
- Can be set up to achieve the funding level needed for only a nominal monthly amount to the ratepayers

Are We Ready to Align Politics, Policies, and Needs?

- Lots of great things have been achieved to date
- Popular public opinion indicates there is a strong desire to address the flooding and drainage issues we face routinely in our community
- Prioritization, specific policies, implementation plans, and other tactical issues will evolve further and can be adapted in a very robust manner
 - Don't get caught up in the weeds
 - Maintain a vision with an end goal and clear objective
- Help create and sustain a wave (excuse the pun) of interest and support
- Must be willing to invest political capital and support for our local politicians in this endeavor
- Educate, educate, educate our public

Thank You

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