

Frustrated South McAllen residents plead for relief from June rains

Mitchel Ferman | Staff Writer

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South McAllen residents attend an open city meeting to voice their concerns over drainage improvements to the southwest part of town at McAllen City Hall Monday, Aug. 13, 2018, in McAllen. Joel Martinez | jmartinez@themonitor.com

McALLEN — Residents of South McAllen pleaded with city leaders Monday for help after rain flooded parts of their colonias in June.

Before the June rains hit the Rio Grande Valley, city commissioners voted earlier this year to impose a drainage utility fee, which was implemented in March and was said to go toward drainage improvements across the city. That fee was implemented in March.

In May, McAllen voters approved a \$22 million bond in a May election for drainage improvement projects in the city. There will end up being 22 drainage projects stemming from that bond election, according to the city budget.

However, [Valley Interfaith](#) organized a group of people living in Balboa, Hermosa and Idela colonias to plead with city commissioners before Monday's commission meeting at city hall.

"These are the areas most affected by flooding and were not represented in the plan," said Jose Lopez, a member of the concerned citizens, of the plan for the bond projects. "We need the city to fix the damage in South McAllen. We ask, what is the city going to do to fix this problem?"

City commissioners do not respond to public comments, but Mayor Jim Darling encouraged Lopez to set up a meeting with the city manager and engineering director.

Lopez, for one, lost his 2008 Chevrolet Impala in the flooding, he said after publicly commenting to commissioners. Others in his colonia, and those surrounding, had their homes and cars flooded, Lopez said.

The city's 22 drainage projects from the May bond election will likely cost \$11.6 million over the next year and \$9.9 million the following year, pending commission approval.

The costliest projects from the \$22 million bond, according to the budget, are: \$5.6 million for the Bicentennial Blueline for improvements of undersized existing storm sewer system from Tamarack Avenue to Harvey Avenue; \$5.2 million for the Northwest Regional Stormwater Detention Facility to "propose a regional facility to improve storage capacity of adjacent drainage channel."

Two of the cheaper projects from that bond, according to the budget, are: \$19,360 for Iris Avenue at Cynthia Avenue for improvements of limited and undersized existing storm sewer system; \$28,000 for East Tamarack Avenue for "improvements of limited and undersized existing storm sewer system."

The drainage utility fee collection, meanwhile, varies depending on the size of a property. McAllen's engineering department estimated the average residence in McAllen is 2,700 square feet, which would amount to a \$1.50 monthly fee on residents' utility bill. The average McAllen property's drainage utility fee would be \$18 per year.

City officials determined the fee for each property by taking the total square footage of impervious cover at a property, divide it by 2,700 — the average square footage of a McAllen single-family residence — and multiply that number by \$1.50.

Impervious cover is everything on a property that is essentially an artificial structure. Examples of impervious cover include a garage, pool house, cabana or porch. The Hidalgo County Appraisal District uses codes for every piece of impervious cover on a property. These codes appear on property tax bills. The city uses these codes to determine square footage of impervious cover on the property.

The city hosted public hearings for the drainage fee, but the public was not interested. Less than 50 people attended the multiple hearings in the winter.

mferman@themonitor.com