

Community groups urge ‘yes’ vote on \$190 million drainage bond issue



By Blanca Gomez

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EDINBURG, RGV – Community groups are urging voters in Hidalgo County to support a \$190 million of dollars to improve drainage systems.

Various groups in the RGV Equal Voice Network also praised Hidalgo County for modifying the Model Subdivision Rules that govern the construction of houses in unincorporated areas.

“We’re not going to say that it’s going to solve all these problems, but it’s going to help,” said Amber Arriaga-Salinas assistant executive director of Proyecto Azteca, referencing the change to the Model Subdivision Rules.

“Today we are thanking the county and the planning department, the drainage department and the commissioners court for everything they have done in support of the drainage bonds and also for the new subdivision rules.”

RGV Equal Voice Network is pleased that after record breaking rainfall in June devastated several areas of Hidalgo County, the County Commissioners, Drainage and

Planning Departments came together to assess and took proactive measures to identify and prioritize drainage projects needed to improve drainage infrastructure. Leaders in the group pointed out that prior to and aside from the rains, the Hidalgo County Planning Department had been working for years to make changes to the Model Subdivision Rules with input from landowners, engineers, developers and the community. They said the changes approved at the county commissioners' court on Tuesday, October 9, will ensure that those moving into new model subdivisions will have better infrastructure.

Texas has approximately 2,300 colonias and Hidalgo County has the highest concentration.

"We have the largest number of colonias. In Hidalgo County we have over 925 colonias and what we are talking about today is modifying the Model Subdivision Rules," said Ann Williams Cass, chairperson of RGV Equal Voice housing working group.

"Model Subdivision rules came in 1994 to check the proliferation of colonias without infrastructure, so the Model Subdivision Rules said, 'hi guys you can't built in any area unless you follow these rules.' Now the rules are being modified by the county to make them even better, providing street lights and making sure the drainage is connected to the outfall."

The new model subdivision rules are going require developers to include better paved streets and even stop signs for children.

"What we have done is officially adopted these changes in the subdivision rules," said T.G. Arredondo, Hidalgo County's director of planning.

Hidalgo County officials said colonias affected by the devastating floods of June, 2018, will benefit from the bond issue.

"If the bond is approved, once this project is initiated and completed, it will have immediately impact in those areas," said Raul E. Sesin, general manager of Hidalgo County Drainage District No. 1.

Valley Interfaith

Meanwhile, **Valley Interfaith** has announced it is endorsing Proposition A, the Hidalgo County Drainage District #1 flood infrastructure bond, on the November ballot. The group said that after seeing the destruction of countless homes, the loss of irreplaceable property and memories, and seeing how unprepared the Valley's flood infrastructure was for the June 20 flood event, it is vital the \$190 million-dollar bond wins approval.

The bond issue includes \$1 million dollars for south McAllen and \$15 million for the Raymondville Drain Project. Valley Interfaith leaders believe this bond will improve flood preparedness across the Valley.

"We are walking neighborhoods and talking with our neighbors. We ask our them, 'What issue most affects your family?' Every house says the same: we need to improve the flood infrastructure," said Dayra Campos, a leader with Valley Interfaith from San Juan Diego in south McAllen. "They remind us that south McAllen didn't just flood on June 20 – we flood every time we get any real rain."

Eddie Anaya, a leader with Valley Interfaith from St. Frances Cabrini in south Pharr said: "Never before has Las Milpas received money to improve the drainage in this community from Hidalgo County. We stand to receive an unprecedented \$15 million dollars that will improve the drainage in south Pharr. We sat down with Commissioner Cantú and expressed our community's concerns about the original design. He listened, and we like the changes they made. Madre Cabrini stands with our sister institutions in support this bond."

Andy Noriega, a Valley Interfaith leader from St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church in Weslaco, said: "People keep talking about the June 20th floods. But in 2015, our homes flooded with just an inch less of rain than what fell on June 20th. We see that these proposed projects will take water out of our families' homes and into retention ponds and canals. That is why we support this bond."