

Special Flood Protection Meeting of Community Leaders

Hosted by the Eden Isles Homeowners Association, Special Projects Committee

On Thursday, March 10, 2011, a “Kick Off” meeting of community leaders living in the southeast area of St. Tammany was held at Mr. Lee Longstreet’s home in Eden Isles, Louisiana.

Louisiana State Senator A. G. Crowe had asked the Eden Isles H.O.A. special projects committee to identify key talent and other interested stakeholders to help as part of a steering committee in identifying flood protection plans for the Eden Isles / Oak Harbor / Clipper Estates / North Shore Beach / Palm Lake areas. These are the most vulnerable areas on the north shore impacted by hurricane storm surge.

Mr. Steven Ward, with Gulf Engineers & Consultants (GEC), under contract with the state, had agreed to address the group and discuss the “North Shore Hurricane Flood Protection and Restoration Plan”. GEC is the Engineering firm that the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority hired to prepare a “Master Plan” to identify north shore hurricane flood protection projects. Mr. Ward’s presentation would have provided valuable insight concerning the state’s plans on north shore protection. Unfortunately, Mr. Ward canceled a few hours before the meeting due to a conflict which he could not change.

Despite Mr. Ward’s absence, the meeting took place and the participants discussed what might be done to develop a comprehensive storm surge protection plan that would include protection for the residents living along the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain. Two key members of the group; Dr. Pat Fitzpatrick, research professor of meteorology at Mississippi State University and Professional Engineer Dennis Strecker, formally with the Corps of Engineers and now working as a consultant in the design of numerous flood gates around the New Orleans area, provided information on storm surge impact and modeling. Computer visual aids including Google Earth were used to discuss the topography as well as reference other studies and data. Handouts on the presentations were also made available.

There was discussion concerning the projects that have been built or that are being built along the southern and eastern shores of the lake and what additional impact that may have on the north shore.

As hurricanes approach, the storm surge gradually enters the lake and builds up along the western portion. Upon passage of a storm the winds change direction. The surge created by the change in wind direction rapidly forces the accumulated contents of the lake to rush to the east end of the lake. As a result of the hurricane projects along the southern and eastern shorelines of the lake, the only place the water can exit is through the narrow opening under the I-10 Twin Spans followed by the smaller Rigolets and Chef Passes and through our neighborhoods. As was the case for Katrina, this back-end surge has a disastrous impact on the tens of thousands of St. Tammany residents and businesses south of I-12 from Lacombe to Rigolets Estates.

The group agreed the best, most cost effective and comprehensive plan is to prevent the storm surge from entering the lake in the first place. This conclusion is nothing new; the Corp of Engineers came to the same conclusion over forty years ago.

However; recently John Faust, of Moonraker in Eden Isles has been proposing an alternative. This alternative was presented to our new found experts and was warmly received. John's plan was to simply recognize there has already been a 10' barrier that runs from New Orleans all the way through Mississippi. This is the CSX rail system which happens to cross the Rigolets at possibly the best spot to install gates. It was also discovered that Mr. Strecker, now retired from the USACE, had proposed a barrier composed of control gates to manage surge based upon a 10' surge model with allowance for controlled overtopping. His plan was specifically designed to prevent the pre-filling of the lake during the few days prior to landfall so the level of the lake would be low enough to be able to absorb and contain the final assault of a hurricane without causing flooding. His complete proposal is on the web at <http://hurricanegates.blogspot.com>

The merging of these two relatively recent proposals could be the new lowest cost solution. This plan would seem to circumvent environmental concerns as well because it would simply be using an existing barrier that has been in place for many years without concern. It would simply be a matter of adding gates to that existing barrier. Those gates would only be closed for a few days a year if and only prior to the approach of a hurricane.

Longstreet pointed out that even if the proposed new take on a barrier plan was implemented, the berm / breakwater proposal by Senator Crowe would still be very beneficial in knocking down and redirecting wind driven surge flow away from highly populated neighborhoods while the barrier system would manage the static level to keep the lake below flood stage.

The group also discussed the realities of cost and political implications of revisiting the Corps preferred barrier plan or a modified less costly alternative. It was understood that strong political backing will be necessary to gain the attention required for funding. It is hoped that a policy of inclusion regarding the various groups and stakeholder neighborhoods will achieve the required momentum.

At the meeting no conclusions about near term construction projects could be identified without Mr. Ward's participation. It is hoped the ideas that evolved from subject experts in attendance will become part of the feasibility studies to be developed under state contract with Mr. Ward and GEC during future meetings.

At the end of the meeting, Longstreet stated that he would provide Senator Crowe with this report along with the names and contact information of those the Eden Isles Homeowners Association, Special Projects Committee had identified. Senator Crowe has indicated he is in favor of calling another group meeting with Mr. Ward in attendance and

that our group be included in the planning stages of the “North Shore Hurricane Flood Protection and Restoration Plan”.

Those identified as actively interested stakeholders are listed in the attached table. It should be noted; however, that this list should be treated as non-public information unless such individuals indicate otherwise at a later time.

In addition to the core neighborhood stakeholders, also in attendance were representatives from the St. Tammany parish department of engineering and State Representative Greg Cromer’s office.