

## County says upgrades averted flood damage

By John W. Gonzalez | May 27, 2013 | Updated: May 28, 2013 12:58am

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The Laddie Place Regional Storm Water Facility Phase III is designed to control flooding and serve as a recreation area.

Bexar County's 10-year, \$500 million flood control program was tested by weekend flooding, and officials said Monday that the few completed upgrades — including a

bolstered Olmos Dam — worked as intended.

As a result, people and property were kept from danger in at least 15 trouble spots, said county Engineer Renee Green, who helps oversee the 70-project initiative that began in 2007.

Dozens more flood-prone zones are targeted, including the Woodlawn Lake area, where construction is about to begin on one of the county's biggest flood control projects. Over 18 months, the former site of Northwest Plaza Shopping Center and flea market at 3600 Fredericksburg Road will be converted into a sunken green space that can temporarily hold huge amounts of storm runoff.

“We think it's going to be a jewel in our area,” said Maverick Neighborhood Association President Frank Fonseca, whose neighborhood is across the road from the site.

“It's just a matter of making sure it becomes what it can be,” he said last week.

Laddie Place Regional Storm Water Facility Phase III, with a cost of \$28 million, is designed to end decades of flood problems from Fredericksburg Road to Woodlawn Lake, especially along a creek that became Kampmann Boulevard. About 75 homes will be removed from that flood plain, reducing residents' insurance costs.

Storm runoff from the hills near Loop 410 at

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Interstate 10 makes its way to the San Antonio River, often submerging Fredericksburg, Kampmann and Babcock Road. In the deadly 2002 flood, when 8 inches of rain fell in the area, the shopping center was under 2 feet of water, while numerous Woodlawn-area homes were swamped. Some of the same homes flooded Saturday, and motorists were rescued from submerged vehicles on Kampmann.

But in other parts of town, trouble was averted as finished upgrades performed well under the severe conditions, Green said. Among them were new bridges over low water crossings on Ingram, Evans, Shepherd and Shane roads and \$4 million in upgrades for Olmos Dam, which filled to the brim Saturday. Bexar County also installed more than 50 alert systems at low water crossings.

“Completed flood control projects did perform as intended and did contribute to the safety of the community,” Green said. “There were no high-water rescues in those areas. In previous storm events that were much less intense, you typically had high-water rescues in those areas.”

Eventually, problems will be alleviated in the Woodlawn area, she added. That work is among 10 projects entering the construction phase; 12 others are being planned, and 27 are being designed.

At 10 a.m. Wednesday, County Judge Nelson Wolff, Commissioner Paul Elizondo and other officials break ground at Northwest Plaza to start Laddie III's \$7 million construction phase after myriad challenges and delays. Upon completion in December

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#### MORE INFORMATION

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#### LADDIE PLACE REGIONAL STORM WATER FACILITY PHASE III

Location: 3600 Fredericksburg Road

Purpose: Alleviate flooding near Woodlawn Lake

Design concept: Hold runoff, provide green space

Cost: \$28 million

Construction: June 2013 to December 2014

More information: [Bexar County website on Laddie Place III project](#)

Source: *Bexar County*

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2014, San Antonio will maintain the 26-acre site as a city park, with amenities including soccer fields, a walking path and parking.

Two smaller Laddie Place projects capture some runoff, but those nearby installations haven't sufficiently reduced flooding in major storms like Saturday's record deluge, officials said.

For Laddie III, the county initially faced resistance from shopping center tenants and neighbors. Numerous meetings were held with affected communities, and while consensus gradually was reached on the site's design and amenities, legal feuding ensued when the county used eminent domain to acquire the land.

After paying \$13.8 million for the site in a 2010 out-of-court settlement with owners, the county allotted \$3 million more to compensate 45 displaced businesses. Northwest Plaza, the once-fashionable 1960s shopping center, finally closed in early 2011.

When the center was demolished in 2012, only an old oak mott in the center of the property was left untouched. As the shopping center was torn down to the slabs, the county took steps to mitigate problems from construction traffic, noise, dust and even rodents that fled to nearby apartments complexes.

Since demolition, the fenced-in land has sat idle, raising neighbors' concerns that the project was derailed. But starting next month, a parade of trucks will begin removing vast amounts of soil to make way for two 16-foot-deep ponds that can hold a total of 250 acre-feet of water. An acre-foot is 325,851 gallons.

One pond, the first to fill during floods, will be enclosed by a fence but could be used for recreation.

"We wanted to limit access to this one. The overflow onto that isn't safe for people to be walking around," project manager Bobby Mengden said.

The second pond won't be enclosed and will be circled by a walking trail and covered with soccer fields that will be submerged when the pond fills.

Both basins “will drain relatively quickly after a large rain event,” Mengden said. Water that used to spill over Fredericksburg Road will flow through existing underground culverts to Woodlawn Lake en route to the river.

The city has several projects underway to improve drainage into the lake, including a \$3 million effort on the upper lake and \$25 million on Seeling Channel to the west. The county work, meanwhile, should alleviate problems north of the lake along meandering Kampmann.

Though 18 months away, that's a relief for area residents.

In 2002, excess water came within an inch of Alejandro Soto's door near Woodlawn Lake and prompted him to get more involved with the Woodlawn Lake Community Association, which he now serves as president.

“That was kind of scary,” Soto said. “All this (Laddie III) gives us more assurances that our home is safe.”

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Reporter

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