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# Work to end flood problems nears

*By John W. Gonzalez*

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It's not widely known beyond the South Side, but residents living anywhere near Sixmile Creek know it all too well.

Cutting a drab swath as it trickles eastward from Interstate 35 to the San Antonio River, the creek is notorious for flooding homes and streets several blocks away, most recently in 1998 and 2002.

After years of planning, construction begins in a few weeks on a \$23 million multiphase Bexar County project to end decades of flooding nightmares for South Side residents.

“It's going to take time,” project manager [Marty Cristofaro](#) cautioned residents last week. “Four years of construction out here — that's a lot.”

The meandering creek's concrete channel will be widened in places, and several bridges will be improved in the Sixmile Creek drainage improvement project.

It's the largest among the county's 46 flood-control projects, and it's one of the most eagerly awaited. Even last week's 3-inch rainfall filled the creek channel to the brim, residents reported.

That's why torrential rains in other years played havoc with neighbors. [Leo Lopez](#), who's lived near the creek since 1965, said the 1998 flood was the worst, inundating his home.

“Let me tell you, it's no fun,” Lopez said. “We really took a beating — it rained about 9 inches in an hour and a half,” he said.

By 2002, the city had made enough drainage improvements to ease that year's historic flooding, Lopez said, but the threat from big storms remains. He thanked county officials for pushing for the latest improvements in a part of town seemingly bypassed by progress.

“Our future generations are going to suffer the consequences unless something is done,” Lopez said at last week's community meeting, which drew a few dozen residents.

“For too many years, nothing was ever done” for the South Side, Lopez said. “Now we are seeing things done that are important to this community.”

“This is something that has never been done in the county,” said Precinct 1 Commissioner [Sergio “Chico” Rodriguez](#).

“We decided to spend \$500 million in 10 years to try to help projects in the county and the city. We weren't going to wait for the city to do their projects and bond issues. This was an initiative we took upon ourselves, without raising taxes,” Rodriguez said.

Without condemning any homes, scores of residents will be removed from the creek's sprawling flood plain. And perhaps there won't be more lives lost during big storms that swamp crossings and streets, including the South Flores Street bridge, where a motorist drowned in 2007.

Construction begins with replacement of that bridge.

Groundbreaking on the yearlong bridge replacement work is slated for Feb. 23. Traffic will be detoured to the Roosevelt Avenue bridge nearby.

When the new South Flores Street bridge is ready in May 2013, activity will focus on the creek channel downstream, on the south side of [Stinson Municipal Airport](#) and close to the creek's junction with the river in [San Antonio Missions](#) National Historical Park.

Downstream improvements are designed to remove a bottleneck that produces upstream flooding, officials said.

“We don't stop flooding. All we can do is manage it,” Cristofaro said.

Later phases will widen the creek upstream in the Ashley Road area — up to 60 feet wider in some places — and improve several bridges, including those at Pleasanton Road, Moursund Boulevard, Ashley Road and Garnett Avenue. Proposed upgrades at the Roosevelt Avenue bridge in 2014 could involve state money, officials said.

For at least the next 10 months, however, the focus will be on the South Flores span, which is sure to produce some traffic woes as motorists seek shortcuts through nearby residential areas.

But the payoff is a bridge that will endure major floods and provide new bike lanes and sidewalks. Eventually, once the flood plain maps are revised to take channel improvements into account, residents should pay less for flood insurance, officials said.

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