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Neighborhoods brace for flood projects

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Pointed questions from Alta Vista residents rained down on Bexar County officials who were explaining a huge flood-control project that's about to tear up their quaint central neighborhood.

How long will streets and driveways close? Will heritage oak trees be removed? What's the plan for construction traffic and dust? When will utilities be disconnected?

The concerns raised at an [Alta Vista Neighborhood Association](#) meeting drew blunt responses from county officials, consultants and contractors. They readily conceded the 18-month, \$10 million job — like many other flood-control projects under way around the county — will be disruptive.

Though timing remains uncertain, starting in early April many Alta Vista residents will lose water and sewer service for brief periods, and their streets, sidewalks and driveways will be cut off.

A couple of heritage oaks may be removed to make way for underground culverts. As for the dust, it could be watered down, but then there will be mud everywhere, officials explained.

Art Villarreal, the county's flood control division manager, assured residents the inconveniences would be worthwhile. The project, part of a \$500 million county program, would eliminate perennial flooding on San Pedro Avenue at [Twain Middle School](#).

Workers will excavate several streets, including San Pedro, as they relocate utilities and bury 3,700 feet of culvert 22 feet deep.

“This (flooding) issue has been around ever since this neighborhood was built,” Villarreal said. “It has not been an easy project to design. It will not be an easy project in construction.”

A platoon of county and contractor representatives would address individual concerns throughout the project, he added.

For about two years, the neighborhood group has worked with the county, city, [San Antonio Water System](#), [San Antonio River](#)

[Authority](#), CPS Energy and other entities to share information about the project, known as San Pedro Huisache Phase II.

Despite the outreach, association President [Mark Porter](#) fears some residents could be surprised by construction — even though the project has been outlined in news reports and in the neighborhood newsletter delivered door to door.

“I really believe there are people we have not touched,” he said.

And even though the county addresses the community's questions, Porter, a San Antonio Express-News employee, is concerned not all the right questions have been asked.

“As much as they're trying to get this information out to us, they're leaving something out, and I don't know what it is,” Porter said. However, “when it's done, it should be great.”

Alta Vista is one of many neighborhoods facing turmoil amid flood-related projects. About 30 public works are in various phases of planning and construction — all part of a 10-year county program launched in 2007.

Some of the most noticeable projects are just getting started.

Ingram Road west of the mall began a lengthy closure for bridge construction at Huebner and Leon creeks. A Northwest Side shopping center will be razed to make room for a retention pond to remedy flooding near Woodlawn Lake. Bridge construction is under way on Shepherd Road in south Bexar County. Historic Olmos Dam is being bolstered. All are county-funded projects.

The county also is part of a city-managed project to address flooding on Broadway at Hildebrand.

Dealing with simultaneous projects has convinced Villarreal of the

benefits of early warnings to affected areas. That's why Villarreal made a presentation last week to the [Monte Vista Historical Association](#) to explain the project in nearby Alta Vista and to outline drainage work contemplated for Monte Vista.

He explained that runoff from Monte Vista contributes to the chronic flooding in Alta Vista. Plans call for tearing into Belknap Place in Monte Vista in 2013 to lay a bigger drain system.

The work in Alta Vista will affect Monte Vista as soon as traffic is detoured and lanes are intermittently closed on San Pedro. Monte Vista residents want close monitoring of the detours so signage and speed limits can be adjusted as needed.

Wade Caldwell, president of the historical association, said the county team has done a good job of communicating with the neighborhood for at least 18 months.

“With any project, it's always the execution of the actual construction that determines whether people are happy,” Caldwell said.

And while no one is thrilled by the construction, the county's outreach determines whether residents “understand it or whether they get upset by it,” he said.

Near the [University of Texas at San Antonio](#), another community has a high level of construction angst.

More than 100 people from numerous Northwest Side subdivisions packed the [John Igo Branch Library](#) to hear from Villarreal and consultants from [AECOM Technology](#) Corp. discuss work slated to start late this year on West Hausman Road near Babcock Road.

Living in an area already swirling in traffic jams, residents said they

feel hemmed in by city — and now county — road and bridge projects, and other development.

“We've got Babcock construction, we've got Prue construction, we've got De Zavala construction and now we're going to have Hausman construction. We've kind of eliminated or blocked up any way we can get home,” one exasperated resident said.

Other UTSA-area residents who hadn't heard much about the project challenged its necessity, timing and designs. But officials said it's too late now to include bike lanes or realign the road, for example.

Villarreal assured residents the work would not fully close Hausman as it expands from two to four lanes and bridges are built over Huesta Creek tributaries to make the road safe during severe floods. As part of the project, about 30 homes were purchased to remove them the flood plain.

There was mild cheering when District 8 Councilman [Reed Williams](#) told residents that UTSA, which is building sports facilities near Hausman and Loop 1604, agreed to make the complex's main entry off Loop 1604 at Kyle Seale Parkway, rather than off already-clogged Hausman.

“It's costing them a little more money,” Williams said. “I had to agree to allow them six months temporary construction entrance (on Hausman). They'll have flagmen there,” he said.

Roger Rubio, who lives near Hausman, lamented that the project does not address chronic flooding at Hausman and Babcock — a project at least three years away. He said officials are trying to ease congestion, but area traffic woes have trained him to allow extra time to get anywhere.

“The best improvement I've found: I leave half an hour earlier,” he said.