

Rio Grande Citizens Forum  
El Paso, TX  
April 17, 2013

Tentative Meeting Notes\*

Board members in attendance

Leslie Kryder, alternate, Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID)  
Sal Masoud, Del Rio Engineering  
Danny Chavez, Hudspeth County Conservation and Irrigation District  
Dale Reinhardt, Town of Clint  
John Cordova, Jobe Materials  
Travis Johnson, Travis Johnson Law Firm  
John Balliew, El Paso Water Utilities (EPWU)  
Dale Reinhardt, Town of Clint

USIBWC Staff in Attendance

Sally Spener  
Hayley Goodstein  
Jose Nuñez  
Gilbert Anaya  
Andrea Glover

Members of the public in attendance

Joel Mora, URS  
Sam Irrinki, URS  
Gonzalo Cedillos, EPWU-Stormwater  
Larry Nance, Upper Valley Neighborhood Association  
Ron Parks, Sundt Construction  
Karen Dello, City of El Paso  
Gilbert Trejo, Arcadis  
John Sparks, Arcadis  
Jacob Hernandez, Parkhill, Smith & Cooper  
Sandra Hernandez, Parkhill, Smith & Cooper  
Marci Tuck, City of El Paso Parks  
John Barrerra, citizen  
Mrs. Johnson, El Paso resident  
Zack Libbin, EBID  
Matt McMillan, SWCA Environmental Consultants  
Judy Ackerman, citizen  
Richard Teschner, Friends of Rio Bosque  
Mike Landis, Reclamation  
Rick Provencio, citizen, Sen. Rodriguez Environmental Advisory Committee  
Yesenia Castro, AMEC  
Brenda Barnes, AMEC  
Alberto Urueta, Zia engineering

**Stormwater Capital Accomplishments and Operations Achievements**

Gonzalo Cedillos, P.E., Stormwater Engineering Manager, El Paso Public Utility Board, gave this presentation.

The Stormwater Utility was started in March 2008. In the five years since then, the Stormwater Utility has built over \$106 million in flood control projects, including 82 major improvements and 50 localized flooding jobs. After the 2006 flood and losses in the City of El Paso, the Stormwater Utility was created.

Five years ago we didn't have funds but we had people and equipment who cleaned ditches, canals, inlets, and conduits during the first year. Then after the first year, there were over 100 projects that needed to be done costing over \$600 million. So it was structured to do the fee over 20-25 years. Some of the projects received funding support through the North American Development Bank, federal, and state sources. We had an advisory committee help prioritize the projects. We are much better prepared for floods than in 2006.

He showed photos of some projects that have been undertaken. He stated there are pending projects to address flooding in the Paisano-Magnolia area that affects flooding of I-10. There are various infrastructure and permitting issues associated with that work that need to be addressed.

The Storm 2006 bonds included funds for the Dallas Pump Station so that water that accumulates in downtown will go into a conduit to the Rio Grande. Another big project in the Northeast was the Northeast Channel. There were also Open Space improvements, areas that can be integrated into the stormwater system while preserving the space as a wilderness area. There is the Saipan area north of the Medical Center, now converted to a park and pond. There is a project to get more drain capacity on the Montoya Drain. Some of the capital projects are on the east side, such as improving existing ponds that were in poor condition. Localized flooding projects are a nuisance, such as in residential neighborhoods, where we had to send in equipment suck the water out.

We have over 310 drainage ponds totaling 904 acres. We have 39 dams, 74 miles of channels, 42.7 miles of agricultural drains, 145.6 miles of storm drains, over 6000 storm drain inlets, and 20 pump stations. He described how maintenance needs to be performed regularly due to erosion, cleaning out drains and conduits, etc.

In the Doniphan area, we are working to do some drainage works as part of the work to certify the levees.

Judy Ackerman expressed appreciation for the open space projects. She noted that an arroyo near Robinson and Scenic Drives was recently cleared out/bulldozed. She questioned why this clearing of a natural area was needed.

John Balliew, EPWU, stated that it is an EPWU arroyo and we did some work on it. Because of drought and the freeze, there was dry wood and people were concerned about fire damage. We probably could have done it differently and will be meeting with the nearby property owners. The point of contact is Martin Noriega.

### **Construction Update of Levee Projects in Doña Ana County and El Paso County**

Andrea Glover, P.E., USIBWC Civil Engineer, presented an updated on the levee construction/rehabilitation projects being undertaken by the USIBWC.

Mesilla Levee Improvements Phase 2 is almost complete from south of Leasburg to Mesilla Dam. There's 3.5 miles that didn't turn out the way we want and we're going to have to redo. Other than that, the levee is done. Mesilla Phase 1 is done, Hatch is done, Canutillo Phase I is done. Most of the work is done on Sunland Park levee improvements.

On Mesilla 2 (Leasburg to Mesilla Dam, east levee), it was 19.6 miles of levee, a \$17.1 million contract. Repair of the 3.5 miles should be done by September.

The Sunland Park levee (Borderland Bridge to Power Plant, east and west levees) is built. We are waiting to get some testing back before gravel and additional topsoil are placed. That's why the contractor is not on site right now.

Vado levee design (east levee) is completely done. We hope to get into construction this year. It is a 1.1 mile stretch that we skipped before because it was a difficult area to design.

Canutillo Phase 2 (Vinton Bridge to Borderland Bridge, east levee), we have 90% design complete. It is 5.7 miles. We estimate construction 2014-2017, depending on funding. It is an area with the railroad, limited right-of-way.

Courchesne and Nemexas runs from near El Paso Power Plant to American Dam (east levee). It is 3.8 miles. Estimated construction in 2018-2020, depending on funding.

For the Rio Grande Rectification Project, we have done the work from Fabens to Tornillo and Fort Hancock Area. Solicitation for Ysleta to Fabens was canceled. American Canal relining design should be 90% complete and hope to contract construction in 2014 or 2015.

We are starting a noise study for Country Club flood gate and we will do it also for the Canutillo flood gate although we haven't had any complaints there although it is closer to neighbors. It should be 60 days to get the results on that. They will meet with the neighborhood association near Country Club prior to going out and collecting data.

Q: What are you doing to reline the American Canal?

Glover – Because of degrading concrete that is not worth repairing, so we will redo it.

Q: Didn't you do that a few years ago?

Spener – This is one segment that was not done in part due to Asarco-related contamination that needed to be addressed.

Cordova – Why did you cancel the Ysleta to Fabens project?

Glover – Legal issues still need to be worked out with the irrigation district and Department of Homeland Security.

Masoud – Is there any more progress on the FEMA certification? Would like an e-mail update on certification progress in the Rio Grande Canalization Project.

Glover – We meet with FEMA once a month.

Nance – The problem with the floodgates on the bridges is they were built below grade.

Glover – No, the road is domed and the floodgate is flat.

Nance – Since they are going to be redoing Country Club Road, is there any coordination to address the problem of the flood gate noise at the bridge?

Glover – Problems is curved/crowned road with a flat floodgate. We have found several other devices that can be used in lieu of that floodgate but Commissioner Drusina wants to see the noise study and then a decision after that will be made by his office.

Barrera – Could you give us an update on the restoration of Valley Creek Park? You removed soil there, there are huge trenches there.

Glove – We didn't remove soil. Our contractor might have an agreement with the subdivision there to have a borrow pit. Our work stopped at our property line. If they went past where they should have, we can look into it.

Barrera – People are dumping illegally there; it's destroyed the area. It's a pit, wildlife falls in there. It needs to be addressed.

Q: You mentioned getting together with the El Paso irrigation district. What kind of assistance do you need from them?

Nuñez – For Ysleta to Fabens levee, we decided to cancel the solicitation because the legal opinion is that the wasteways don't belong to us and have to be done by the irrigation district and all we were going to do is widen the levee. Our Operations Department said they can work with the width. We can certify the levee the way it is.

### **Public Comment/Future Agenda Items**

Next meeting will be July 17 in Las Cruces. Suggested agenda items include:

- Update on the levee work, more of a timeline and levee certification update. Suggested to have levee status update on every agenda.
- Status of water availability by Reclamation.
- Status of the water budget study.
- River Maintenance Update/Sediment removal was another suggestion. (Spener noted work in the Rincon area is possible but Montoya Drain won't be done until after irrigation season.)

### **Board Discussion**

Travis Johnson – Would like to compliment the PSB and IBWC on the great relationship that the two entities have with each other. It has not always been that way. Both of these entities should be complimented for their great relationship.

Mike Landis (Reclamation) – In follow-up to the suggestion to have a presentation by Reclamation at the next meeting about the status of water availability, we will have a six week release of Rio Grande water from the dams this year, 8 months is a normal irrigation season. It may be the lowest release in the history of the Rio Grande Project. From June to mid-July will be the extent of this year's irrigation season.

John Balliew (EPWU) – Regarding this year's river drought, El Paso Water Utilities is hoping not to have any impact on the customers. We have talked to Parks Department, City, and school districts. It could be that we may ask people to cut back in May for one day out of the week. I think we'll be okay. So the question is for the following year, we don't know if this is the final year of a drought or if we have years to go. We've added millions of gallons of groundwater capacity in anticipation of this problem and we will have millions more ready next year. We are working on it.

\*Meeting notes are tentative and summarize in draft the contents and discussion of Citizens Forum Meetings. While these notes are intended to provide a general overview of Citizens Forum Meetings, they may not necessarily be accurate or complete, and may not be representative of USIBWC policy or positions.