



City of Dallas

Public Safety and Flood Control Always Come First

By Mayor Tom Leppert, Councilmember David Neumann & City Manager Mary Suhm

The integrity of the Dallas levee system and the safety of our City have always been the priority and driving force behind the Trinity River Corridor Project. Any news report or analysis suggesting that any Mayor, City Councilmember or City Manager - past or present – has put the integrity of our levee system behind the larger vision for the Trinity River Corridor Project is uninformed, untrue and irresponsible. A look at the facts and history of the project clearly bears that out.

Over the past two decades City staff has maintained and improved our levee system under the watchful eye of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In fact, until last year every Corps inspection – *every one of them* - gave our levees good or excellent ratings. Periodic Inspection #8 in 2002 stated “the overall condition of the Dallas Floodway System is excellent.” In 2006, a top Corps engineer wrote, “The levees were designed and constructed to USACE standards and are structurally sound” and d “the City of Dallas, has effectively maintained the levees as part of their overall project operation and maintenance program.” It was only *after* post-Katrina changes came into play that the City’s levees failed inspection - as did levees in hundreds of other cities where the Corps is now implementing new, more stringent rating requirements. This important fact was buried in the recent story, overshadowed by an inaccurate headline.

Remember, the Dallas levees are built to an 800-year flood standard, much higher than the 100-year flood standard levees being built in New Orleans. Nonetheless, Dallas is devoting substantial manpower, resources and funding to address Corps concerns by repairing, maintaining and improving the levees, just as the city has done for years.

- In the 1990’s the City dredged the river channel and placed fill on 6 miles of the 23 mile levee system to improve slope stability.
- The City also constructed the Rochester Levee without Corps cost-sharing participation. The Corps later reimbursed the City.

- The City fought for equal protection for all neighborhoods when the Corps' original Dallas Floodway Extension project would have still left Cadillac Heights vulnerable to flooding.
- And in 2008, the City opened part of the Lower Chain of Wetlands reducing flood levels by 1 foot upstream, a tremendous improvement.

Was there a conscious decision to tie flood control elements to recreation and transportation pieces of the Trinity River Corridor Project? Of course. Flood control projects are a hard sell with voters, who rejected Dallas Floodway Extension bond elections in both 1973 and 1978. However, these pieces never delayed any required levee improvements.

Unfortunately, the troublesome analysis by the Dallas Morning News did not include any of this critical history or context - though all of this is available on the city's web site. The analysis also failed to note this important fact: ***80% of the 198 operations and maintenance fixes sited by the Corps in 2009 are now complete.***

In addition to the daily work being done to strengthen our levee system, efforts continue to secure federal funds for flood control.

- Over the past 10 years Dallas has secured \$108M in federal funding.
- A month ago, the City Council moved money from the Lakes project so that the Corps would not have to stop its work on the critical Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as its funding had run dry. Indeed, City officials want the EIS completed so that additional flood protection can be put into place.
- And just a week ago, the Corps' Lt. General Van Antwerp was in Dallas and was briefed on flood protection, funding concerns, time line issues and on ways we can move forward on flood protection projects, namely, the removal of the Santa Fe Trestle and the construction of the Sylvan Avenue Bridge.

Clearly, a complex and important endeavor like the Trinity River Corridor Project poses many challenges, large and small. Make no mistake, as each concern or opportunity for improvement is presented, levee integrity and the safety of Dallas citizens will always come first.

Tom Leppert is mayor of Dallas (tom.leppert@dallascityhall.com), Councilmember David Neumann chairs the Trinity River Corridor Project Committee (david.neumann@dallascityhall.com) and Mary Suhm is Dallas City Manager (mary.suhm@dallascityhall.com).