

## Future of flood control project at site of former country club remains in doubt.

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Raveneaux Country Club and golf course in the Champion Forest neighborhood after Hurricane Harvey in 2017.



Courtesy of Harris County Flood Control District

The Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD) still wants to purchase land that had constituted the former site of the Raveneaux Country Club in northwest Harris County, but negotiations with the owner of the property, which apparently broke down several months ago, remain stalled.

The district currently owns 27.6 acres where the country club's clubhouse formerly sat. At the time it purchased that site, in January 2020, the HCFD said the purchase was the first step toward acquiring all of the former country club property, with the intent of

building a flood-risk reduction project, designed to reduce flooding in the Cypress Creek watershed.

However, to date, the flood control district has not reached an agreement to purchase the roughly 206-acre tract where the golf course sits on property owned by the Cypress Forest Public Utility District (PUD).

Sheldra Brigham, a spokeswoman for the flood control district, said that without securing additional land from the PUD, the HCFCD cannot design and build a functional stormwater detention basin on the site.

“The Flood Control District continues to be open to conversations about the purchase of additional property on the site,” Brigham said in an email statement on May 20. Negotiations over the property broke down in December after the flood control district and the utility district failed to come to an agreement on the value of the property in question.

Although Brigham declined to say how far apart the two sides were in their negotiation, last December then-HCFCD Deputy Executive Director Matthew Zeve had said the difference was about \$9.5 million.

Brigham said there is currently no timetable set for resuming negotiations with the public utility district. “The timeline for any future negotiations will be determined by a variety of factors, such as willingness to negotiate, community input and the number of parties involved,” she said.

Greer Pagan, general counsel for Cypress Forest PUD, said not much has happened in the last several months to break the impasse in negotiations that the two sides seem to have reached. “We’re still interested in working out an arrangement,” he said. He added that the PUD was studying what options it has for the disposition of the property.

In the meantime, the HCFCD is doing what it can to ensure the public’s safety and preserve the small portion of the former country club property that it does control.

In March, teams from the Flood Control District planted a tree and shrub buffer at the site along Cypresswood Drive. Plantings included approximately 75 native pine, oak and other trees and more than 200 native evergreen shrubs, such as yaupon, wax myrtle and cherry laurel. The HCFCD said it would maintain the plantings for the next two years.

Earlier this month, the flood control district announced the start of demolition to remove all remaining structures on the former Raveneaux Country Club property including parking lots, tennis courts and swimming pool. The district estimated that the demolition and removal of material would take between 35 and 40 days, based on weather conditions.

Proposal goes back two years

The current impasse dates back more than two years, when in January 2020, the flood control district announced plans to purchase the entire Raveneaux Country Club property to construct a flood control project. The land has been the site of frequent flooding, most notably during Hurricane Harvey in 2017 when flood waters inundated the golf course.

The district purchased the 27.6-acre site where the country club's clubhouse sat from Kera Development LP and Cypress/Raveneaux LLC, but failed to reach an agreement to purchase the remaining golf course site. Last September the district razed the shuttered clubhouse in the interest of protecting the public health and safety.

In her statement, Brigham said the flood control district would likely not need to use the entire 206-acre tract owned by the PUD to build a stormwater detention basin to mitigate flood risks in the area.

"There is no set number of acres needed to construct a stormwater detention basin," she said. "The final capacity, design and footprint of any potential project is determined by the amount and location of available property, the most effective design for reducing flood risks, potential amenity partners and the community's input on the effort. Previous discussions have been in the 80- 100-acre range."

Brigham said the original vision for an agreement concerning the former Raveneaux property involved a so-called "win-win-win" scenario, in which the flood control district would build a stormwater detention alongside continued golf operations or other recreational amenities on the site.

Under this scenario, a third-party entity would maintain and operate the recreational facilities on property owned by the flood control district, provided that those facilities were "compatible with the property's primary flood damage reduction purpose," Brigham said.

"The ultimate project will be determined by the final agreement, the vision of the entities involved, and community input," she said.

Depending on the complexity of the site, a typical project by the Harris County Flood Control District can take anywhere from three to five years to complete, from the feasibility study phase, through preliminary engineering, right-of-way acquisition and utility relocation, and design and construction phases.

Should the HCFCD fail to secure the property it needs to build a flood control project at the site of the former country club through a negotiated settlement, the district could still secure the land it needs through condemnation.

"At this time, all options are on the table," Brigham said. "The Flood Control District and other entities have the right to declare a public need and necessity in order to use the eminent domain process to acquire property at fair market prices. That said, the Flood Control District is interested in conducting good- faith negotiations with the Cypress Forest PUD."