



NEWS RELEASE

***The Flood Next Time: What we can do now*; report by the Greater Houston Flood Mitigation Consortium focuses on response and recovery**

Report presents ideas for locating homes and businesses away from flood-prone areas, removing people from harm's way when a storm arrives, and returning people to normalcy as quickly as possible after a storm

HOUSTON – May 13, 2019 – The [Greater Houston Flood Mitigation Consortium](#) has released the report ***The Flood Next Time: What we can do now***, a follow-up report to its 2018 *Strategies for Flood Mitigation in Greater Houston, Edition 1*. This report presents a set of ideas on how the region can better deal with rainfall flooding, emphasizing that response and recovery to our region's flooding are as critical as infrastructure and building regulations because we simply cannot eliminate all flooding. The consortium's major conclusions are based on its research of the past two years, the professional expertise of its members, and investigations into best practices from cities across the world.

According to Consortium Project Manager Christof Spieler, "As the work of the consortium reaches its conclusion, we are sharing the full scope of the ideas and suggestions our research has sparked in order to better prepare the Houston region, its businesses and its residents for inevitable future flooding events. For people to get back to normal quickly, the networks, resources, and processes required for recovery need to be in place and ready to go before the rain starts falling. Fortunately, Houston has the expertise, experience, and resources to face flooding head-on, and it is the responsibility of every Houstonian to do their part to prepare for the next storm and to advocate for a continued discussion on flooding and resiliency."

The report is divided into three main topics, with suggestions to create resiliency and best solve flooding-related issues within each topic area. Implementing the ideas will require collaboration between multiple agencies and even legislation.

Keeping People High and Dry

While Houston will never be able to totally eliminate flooding as a region, locating homes and businesses away from areas likely to flood will reduce the number of people negatively affected.

How to achieve this:

- ❖ **Ensure an informed public.** Provide residents with access to information that empowers them to consider risks and make informed decisions for themselves and their communities.

Probabilistic risk maps, informational flyers, flood information plaques attached to homes, flood totems, and other flood-focused artwork marking flood levels in public spaces are just a few of the options available to keep communities aware and keep flood risks top-of-mind for residents. Bills filed in the Texas Legislature requiring disclosures for homeowners and renters (Huffman SB#339 and Coleman HB#993), if they are successful, represent very important steps toward protecting Texans from flooding.

- ❖ **Consider creative housing strategies.** Home buyouts, elevating homes, and major infrastructure improvement projects have been the standard for dealing with residential flooding, but these strategies can be time-consuming and expensive. Home-swapping programs, home resilient reconstruction in buyout areas (or turning the land into recreational spaces), and preemptive flood-proofing are other options to consider.
- ❖ **Support infrastructure investments at the neighborhood level.** The role of infrastructure within a neighborhood, down to the individual property, should be considered as it can have a collective, meaningful impact. That can include site improvements, appropriate neighborhood detention and drainage, local drainage improvements, drainage maintenance, and structural projects that integrate gray and green infrastructure.
- ❖ **Guide deliberate development.** It is important to weigh whether current regulations promote or discourage development that can result in more flooding. The report suggests watershed based development regulations, building regulations to address existing homes, strategically conserving pervious land, incentivizing denser urban infill, and one-stop flood permitting for a more streamlined process.

Remove People from Harm's Way

In addition to keeping people safe during a flood event, we must also minimize the opportunity for harm before the storm, in order to protect residents from property loss and major disruption to their lives.

How to achieve this:

- ❖ **Provide timely information.** Targeted and specific information is important so that residents can make informed decisions specific to their location and situation. Flood warning and alert systems and targeted, strategic evacuations by geographic area or specific populations protect residents and facilitate the evacuation process. Rice University's Severe Storm Prediction, Education, and Evacuation from Disasters (SPEED) Center has developed a system, FAS4, and the Harris County Flood Control District has continued to improve available online information. In April 2019, the district was approved for funding to construct a new public Flood Warning System website that will allow residents to take action and help protect life and property.
- ❖ **Advance preparation of key buildings and hazard facilities.** Within any area there are facilities which may be utilized for other purposes during a flooding event, as well as those which may need special consideration. The report suggests equipping schools as shelters and response hubs and creating resilient senior living facilities to minimize the need for difficult evacuations. Further, there is a need for thorough risk management plans for hazardous facilities and the

importance of resilient power supplies and wastewater infrastructure. Transportation considerations include ideas such as elevating key road links and automatic underpass closures intended to keep drivers safe and allow for evacuations.

Return People to Normalcy

Once a storm has occurred, it is important to have a strategy to return people back to their normal lives – physically, financially, and emotionally.

How to achieve this:

- ❖ **Plan buyout strategy in advance.** For residents who have lost their home to floodwaters, getting out of a temporary housing situation and back into a permanent home is essential. To expedite this process, the report suggests advance planning for buyouts, rapid buyout approval and processing, and purchasing flood insurance to protect against financial loss and to recover more quickly.
- ❖ **Coordinate recovery services.** There will undoubtedly be a need for assistance post-storm and having those procedures and protocols in place make a stressful, complicated situation more manageable. Preparing a statewide response network, coordinating public benefits, using common intake and coordination systems, setting up a network of case managers and organizing public transportation to fill in transportation gaps are some of the suggestions highlighted.

The report contains details on these and a variety of other ideas put forward by the leading researchers and nonprofit experts of the consortium as well as contributed expertise. A link to the full report can be found at houstonconsortium.org.

Symposium – May 14

The Consortium will hold a public event presenting the findings from this report as well as its 2019 body of work. The event is free and open to the public; registration is encouraged. Register at <http://bit.ly/2Wz6oR6>.

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About the Consortium:

The Greater Houston Flood Mitigation Consortium includes the Greater Houston area's [leading researchers](#) focused on landscape-scale and neighborhood-level flood mitigation strategies that are feasible and have high potential for impact. Huitt-Zollars, a planning, engineering, and architectural firm, manages the consortium. The consortium is funded with support from [Houston Endowment](#), [Kinder Foundation](#), and the [Cynthia & George Mitchell Foundation](#) with additional support from the [Walton Family Foundation](#), [Cullen Foundation](#), and Harte Charitable Foundation. More at houstonconsortium.org.

Media Contact:

Claudia Morlan, Elmore Public Relations | claudia@elmorepr.com | 832-725-6884 (mobile)