

Exploration Green prevents flooding, enhances Houston-area community

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A former golf course is now an innovative park designed to hold 500 million gallons of stormwater

AUSTIN, Texas — Hurricane Harvey flooded thousands of Texas homes in August 2017, but about 150 in Clear Lake City stayed dry because of an innovative collaboration between the local water authority and the community.

In 2005 the owner of a golf course on the southeast edge of Houston announced he planned to close the course and develop homes and businesses in its place. The Clear Lake City Water Authority evaluated the impact of the proposed development and found it would significantly increase flooding in an area that already had a history of floods.

John Branch and others at the Water Authority, however, saw an opportunity: If the Water Authority purchased the land, it could be used to prevent flooding while also providing open space for recreation and wildlife habitats.

“We went to the voters and said we’d like to do this project,” said Branch, president of the Water Authority Board of Directors. “The Water Authority can pay for putting in the detention ponds, and the conservancy that we form can go out and get grants and donations and pay for all the amenities, the hike and bike trails and the benches.”



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Page 1 of 3

The voters responded “overwhelmingly yes” and approved a bond proposal in 2011 that included \$28 million for Exploration Green. Workers began excavating in 2016 and had nearly finished the first of five detention ponds when Hurricane Harvey inundated the Houston area in August 2017.

“We had our first pond almost completed, and it held about 100 million gallons of stormwater,” Branch said. “We estimated about 150 houses that normally flood when we have a serious rain did not flood this time.”

When the final phase of Exploration Green’s development is complete, estimated for 2022, the project’s five ponds will hold 500 million gallons of stormwater.

“Not only are we keeping people’s homes from flooding, but we’re keeping the environment cleaner, we’re providing bird habitats, we’re providing the recreation for kids,” Branch said.

He noted that Exploration Green has achieved its success largely because of generous donations of time, money and expertise from members of the Clear Lake City community.

“This is what local governments can do to get the maximum benefit for the dollars you spend and ... get the community involved,” he said.

To view a video about Exploration Green, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ap2QUHxgIVM or www.facebook.com/FEMAHarvey. To learn more about the project and the Exploration Green Conservancy, see www.explorationgreen.org.



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For additional information on Hurricane Harvey and Texas recovery, visit the Hurricane Harvey disaster web page at www.fema.gov/disaster/4332, Facebook at www.facebook.com/FEMAHarvey, the FEMA Region 6 Twitter account at www.twitter.com/FEMARegion6 or the Texas Division of Emergency Management website at <https://tdem.texas.gov/>.



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