

Citizens want quick action to improve drainage in Alexandria

By RT Morgan • rtmorgan@thetowntalk.com • January 27, 2009

Two messages rose to the top of the Alexandria City Council public hearing on drainage: residents want action, and they want it now.

"We can't wait," said Mike Redman, a vocal flood victim who talks about the importance of drainage improvements at almost every City Council meeting. His sentiments were echoed by not one, but the majority of the attending crowd on Tuesday, Jan. 27.

"What we can do to solve it is fix it," said Charles Brown Sr., a 39-year resident of Acadian Village.

One after another, residents like Redman and Brown went before a microphone and expressed their personal concerns about drainage and the fear of another flood.

Council President Myron Lawson said that was exactly the point of the meeting – to gather information from the public, present that to the administration and then work toward solutions.

Many of the residents who spoke Tuesday night had been flooded out of their houses, businesses or schools on more than one occasion, such as during Hurricane Gustav and during December's heavy rains.

Something had to have changed recently to allow this amount of flooding, said Wally Fall, principal at Scott M. Brame Middle School. This area has received heavier rains in the not-so-distant past, and that did not cause widespread flooding.

"What went wrong or what needs fixing?" Brame asked.

Dr. Gregory Bevels warned that continued flooding could cause businesses like his to eventually move out of town. Bevels said it's a similar economic migration that occurred in South Louisiana.

"This is something that could stifle business from coming here and business from staying," he said.

Ken Lachney, who resides along La. Highway 28 West, put forth a possible solution that drew applause from his fellow residents.

"We need to clean what we have," said Lachney, referring to the numerous bayous and drainage canals that take water out of the city.

Lawson responded by saying the city has bond money and capital improvement money ready to put toward drainage.

Russell Gauthier, who resides on Kimberly Street, attended the meeting but did not speak before the council. He talked to The Town Talk about drainage just prior to leaving the meeting.

Gauthier said he knew a lot of people were affected by flooding but didn't appreciate the number until Tuesday's meeting.

Asked about city officials' response, Gauthier said at least they are listening now.

He agreed with Lachney that the one of the best and more immediate projects involves cleaning the city's various drainage infrastructure.

Gauthier added that there doesn't need to be any more studies, just immediate cleaning. It's a project that could have direct results and one that could ease residents' fear of more flooding.

"Every time you hear 80 percent chance of rain, it traumatizes you," said Gauthier, who had 12 inches of water come into his house.

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