

I N D E X

PORT COMMISSION  
OF THE  
PORT OF HOUSTON AUTHORITY  
OF THE PORTS OF HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

October 3, 2019

Event/Action

**General**

Commissioner Fitzgerald, Acting Chairman, convened the meeting of the Port Commission

Deliberation and public comment regarding the Galveston Bay Park Plan storm surge defense system developed by the Severe Storm Prediction, Education, and Evacuation from Disasters (“SSPEED”) Center at Rice University

**Adjourn Meeting**

**Port of Houston Authority  
Special Port Commission Public Meeting**

**Houston, Texas  
October 3, 2019**

A special public meeting of the Port Commission of the Port of Houston Authority of Harris County, Texas was convened on October 3, 2019 at 3:04 p.m., at the Port of Houston Authority Executive Office, Fourth Floor Boardroom, at 111 East Loop North, Houston, Texas 77029. The following Commissioners, staff, and counsel were present:

Clyde E. Fitzgerald, Acting Chairman  
Theldon R. Branch, III, Commissioner  
Stephen H. DonCarlos, Commissioner  
Roy D. Mease, Commissioner  
Roger Guenther, Executive Director  
Erik Eriksson, Chief Legal Officer  
Rich Byrnes, Chief Infrastructure Officer

In addition, the following guests were in attendance:

Michel Bechtel, Mayor of Morgan's Point  
James Blackburn, Severe Storm Prediction, Education, & Evacuation from  
Disasters ("SSPEED") Center  
Brandon Capetillo, Mayor of Baytown  
Billy Combs, Chambers County Commissioner  
Mark Denman, Mayor of Nassau Bay  
Lawrence Dunbar, SSPEED Center  
Jackey Lasater, Mayor of Beach City  
Jerry Mouton, Mayor of Deer Park  
Charles Penland, Walter P Moore  
Louis Rigby, Mayor of La Porte  
Jeff Wagner, Mayor of Pasadena

Commissioner Fitzgerald convened the special meeting of the Port Commission and welcomed everyone. He noted that the special meeting had been called to allow Mr. Blackburn to make a presentation on behalf of the SSPEED Center relating to its Galveston Bay Park Plan (the "Plan"). The Port Commission had suggested at its previous meeting that Mr. Blackburn meet with local mayors to discuss its plan before seeking funding approval of a challenge grant from the Port Authority, and those officials were in attendance for that purpose.

Commissioner Fitzgerald recognized Mr. Blackburn, who provided a quick overview of the Plan, noting how it was different from traditional flood protection. He stressed how recent discussions with the United States Army Corps of Engineers ("Corps") resulted in an announcement that the Plan and the coastal barrier project proposed by the Corps were compatible with one another.

Mr. Blackburn yielded the floor to his colleague, Mr. Dunbar, to provide a more detailed overview. Mr. Dunbar addressed storm surge basics, how residual surges affected Galveston Bay, and the effect of wind on surges within the bay. He also addressed the consequences of a petrochemical tank failure.

Mr. Dunbar highlighted how a “Lake Okeechobee event” could affect the bay and stressed the importance of an in-bay barrier system. He observed that the Corps was subject to limitations on the size of the storm the coastal barrier would be designed to address, and this necessitated the in-bay barrier as further protection.

Mr. Blackburn explained that the SSPEED Center sought to further widen the channel, from the proposed 700 feet of Project 11 to 900 feet. The dredge material from that widening would be used to create the in-bay barrier system, primarily on the west side of Galveston Bay. Mr. Blackburn stressed that the project was to be built under permit, and not using federal or state funds.

Mr. Blackburn recognized that several issues required further research, including salinity impacts, gate design, and impacts on oyster reefs. He emphasized that the SSPEED Center project would not impact the Port Authority’s Project 11 nor compete with the coastal barrier project in any way.

Mr. Blackburn commented that there was no specific plan for raising the funds for the project and that detailed planning would need to be done on that issue, but was confident that a financing plan could be put together, and mentioned “resilience bonds” as a potential funding avenue.

Mr. Blackburn explained that the work would be carried out under three different types of permits subject to a regulatory review which could take two to three years, but first it would take at least a year to develop a detailed design plan. While he was confident in the process, he could not rule out the possibility of discovering a fatal design flaw during this time.

He remarked that the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department believed the project to be workable, and noted that he had spoken with the Houston Yacht Club about the project and how it would help enhance protection for Category 4 and 5 hurricanes while being compatible with sailing.

Mr. Blackburn opened the floor for questions. Mayor Denman observed that the project was a big departure from the Centennial Gate and asked what had caused the change. Mr. Blackburn replied bluntly that nobody liked the Centennial Gate. Mr. Blackburn outlined the various lessons learned from the Centennial Gate proposal and how they were applied to the current Plan.

Commissioner Combs noted that it appeared the majority of the project would have to be built in Chambers County and wanted to know why there had not been any outreach there. Mr. Blackburn reiterated that the SSPEED Center had only just learned of the compatibility of the project with the Corps' coastal barrier, and meeting with Chambers and Galveston Counties were at the top of his list.

Commissioner Mease asked what the cost of the project would be, and Mr. Blackburn stated the projected cost was about \$3 billion to \$6 billion. Commissioner Mease emphasized that the Port Authority was currently trying to widen the channel as part of Project 11, and he did not want anything to stand in the way of that and have competing projects. Mr. Blackburn responded that his project would not compete with Project 11, but that he was just seeking funding for its conceptual design.

Commissioner Mease suggested that \$1 million in funding for further engineering would not be enough and that if the Port Authority were to fund the conceptual design, it may be seen as an endorsement of the SSPEED Center's project.

Mr. Blackburn remarked that if a hurricane came, there might not be an economy along the channel afterwards.

Commissioner Branch clarified that the next phase of the Plan was the feasibility stage. He noted that if the local mayors were on board with investigating feasibility, then he would be as well, and Mr. Blackburn agreed that was the purpose of the current meeting.

Mayor Rigby commented that it appeared there would be significant collateral damage to Old Highway 146 and Chambers County, and that no one had spoken to him or with the City of La Porte about this project.

Mayor Moulton suggest that Mr. Blackburn did understand the economics of widening the channel, and Mr. Blackburn replied that he did not understand that the oil and gas industry was willing to put in most of the money required by Project 11.

Mr. Guenther recognized that a wider channel was undoubtedly safer, that Project 11 aimed to widen the channel to allow for the arrival of new Panamax vessels, and that there would certainly be a Project 12 to follow. He stressed his desire to see the current Project 11 completed and did not want anything to interfere with it.

Commissioner Mease observed that since the oil and gas companies were helping fund Project 11, they would not likely fund Mr. Blackburn's project as well.

Mayor Rigby was skeptical that the yacht club was on board with Mr. Blackburn's project. Mr. Blackburn reiterated he had spoken to two people at the Houston Yacht Club and they were not opposed to the project.

Mayor Mouton asked about the status of the Coastal Barrier. Mr. Blackburn observed that it had received federal funding.

Mayor Bechtel commented that all these projects were competing for a limited amount of funds and Mr. Blackburn's proposal would further divide and dilute the pot of available funds.

Commissioner Combs emphasized that the coastal barrier was more important and should be started before Mr. Blackburn's project. Mr. Blackburn noted that the Corps already had \$2 billion in funds for the coastal barrier project and he was just seeking funds to begin detailed engineering design of his project.

Both Mayor Bechtel and Commissioner Combs emphasized that the coastal barrier was more important and needed to commence first. Mayor Capetillo stressed that further education of the coastal barrier was needed and that above all else he believed that Project 11 was the most important improvement as it was needed to protect the economy.

Mayor Bechtel remarked he was glad to see progress from the Centennial Gate but still believed the proposal was a "west side idea." Mr. Blackburn replied his project was about trying to save the region, since one storm could destroy the entire region. Mr. Dunbar noted how the Plan would work with the coastal barrier.

Mayor Bechtel emphasized that the cost estimates seemed very low, the project would seem likely to cost much more than the number reflected, and questioned whether the costs for things such as gates had been factored in. Mr. Blackburn explained that the numbers presented were not final, but rather "honest" preliminary figures.

Mayor Bechtel continued, asking if items such as ship wakes, compound flooding, storm water runoff, and mitigation costs had been considered. Mr. Blackburn stated that there were no mitigation issues, and the rest of Mayor Bechtel's points would be further explored in the next stage of planning, once funding was secured.

Commissioner Mease suggested that the Port Authority's Project 11 should be started first, then the coastal barrier, and then the Galveston Bay Park Plan. If it was carried out differently, there could be the perception that the Plan was part of the Port Authority's Project 11 project, and he did not want that perception.

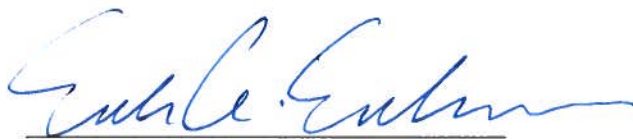
Mr. Guenther noted that the funds Mr. Blackburn was seeking was for a feasibility study, similar to what the Port Authority provided for Project 11. He questioned whether Mr. Blackburn could conduct such a study for \$1 million. Mr. Blackburn remarked that the \$1 million would be a start, and he was just trying to get funding to get the study started.

Commissioner DonCarlos observed that the project may be great, that more protection was always best, but his main reservation was timing, as all the efforts of the Port Authority were currently committed to Project 11 and widening the channel to 700 feet. Even if the feasibility study was successful and the Galveston Bay Park Plan permitted, he did not see the channel being widened to 900 feet in less than 15 years. Commissioner DonCarlos did not question Mr. Blackburn's good intentions, he simply observed that the task was daunting, and the timing was poor. He emphasized that as commissioner, he would not take any action that could hurt Project 11.

At 4:26 p.m., Commissioner Fitzgerald adjourned the Port Commission meeting.

The above is a correct copy of the Minutes of the October 3, 2019 special meeting of the Port Commission of the Port of Houston Authority.

  
Clyde Fitzgerald, Acting Chairman

  
Erik A. Eriksson, Secretary