

SHADY ACRES & WHITE OAK BAYOU FLOODWAY

March 19, 2007

Mayor Bill White
901 Bagby
Houston, Texas 77002

Dear Mayor White

I am requesting that you revisit the 2006 revisions to Chapter 19-43 of the Houston Building Floodway Code. I am aware that there has been at least some conversation with Councilman Garcia about the establishment of a Task Force to explore more progressive, sustainable and, yes, compassionate building codes. I understand that these progressive codes are evident in other cities. Floodway property owners should not personally financially bear the full weight of Houston's lost floodplain capacity. **We must find a more equitable, democratic way to share in the responsibility for the loss of Houston's floodplain capacity. A Flood and Drainage Fee sufficient to fund fair compensation packages as well as other floodplain protection measures would be a ready suggestion.** Houston has always done things differently and creatively. Houston has enormous resources. The revisions to Chapter 19 are at the least mean-spirited, and out of character for a Mayor and a City that showed such heart during the rescue of the victims of Katrina. We can do better.

I am grateful for the focus on flooding in the city. I am in the White Oak Bayou floodway and so I am acutely aware of the critical nature of the issue. I purchased my Shady Acres home 22 years ago. It is situated on a double lot. The vacant lot was to be my retirement and my financial security. I paid my mortgage off 18 months ago. When I purchased my home it was not located in any flood hazard zone. Understand that my home, as well as the large percentage of the homes in my section of the floodway did not flood prior to Allison and did not flood during Allison. My home is almost 100 years old and shows no evidence of ever having flooded. I am, therefore, not eligible for a federal buyout. I do have flood insurance. The restrictions of **Building Codes for Floodways Chapter 19 Section 43 have converted my comfortable real estate investment into a complete loss. It is all I have. I am not unique. These regulated floodways exist on all the city's bayous and many creeks throughout the city.**

The "substantial damage" portion and the zero tolerance for new construction aspect of this ordinance cuts off the life blood of economic development for the neighborhoods in the floodways. This is a prescription for the creation of slums. We will not be able to find

buyers for our properties. Individuals will be limited by the onerous restrictions, and prevented from investing in their homes and businesses. We will exist in substandard housing and structures. Immediately, we cannot recoup our investment. The city's bayous will become encrusted with deteriorating and derelict structures. We understand that the city plans to pay a reduced bargain basement prices for our properties sometime in the future in order to expand its parkland. I am not a wealthy individual who can withstand such a loss. This will condemn me to a life of poverty. What an ugly effort on the part of my city.

You have just received a well deserved honor for your decisions and compassion that you demonstrated during the rescue of the Katrina victims. I am proud of you and proud of our city. However, I do wonder how to square this with the disenfranchisement that I know I have experienced. It would seem that there was more talk about us than with us. Even now there is still a dearth of information available to the public. Many victims of Chapter 19 are likely completely unaware of their precarious circumstance. The Flood and Drainage " stakeholders "group did not include people like me who stood to lose everything, only those who stood to gain tremendously from our loss. Why were we not included in any discussions anywhere? Where is the transparency and open debate that is the hallmark of democratic governance?

I am saddened and distressed that you have been advised to take Houston down the path that has lead to such anger and fear. I hear my neighbors say that Houston is the "enemy". I hear how frightened we all are of our city government. We believe that we have been deceived and betrayed by the very people who swore to represent our interests, serve and protect us. We know that we have been disenfranchised. It is a terrible thing to be so distrustful, so enraged, and even frightened of the people that we elected to represent us.

I am a native Houstonian, who has lived in the same neighborhood the large majority of my life. I have volunteered for years in our community, in our parks and with the various bayou groups. I have won city wide awards for my efforts. I am active and involved in my community. I am an educator for children with disabilities. I love Houston. It is my home. Please help me restore my faith in my government. Please let me help find a better way to preserve our city.

Sincerely,

Nancy Wilcox