Once a reliable revenue source, recycling costs mount

Reduced demand for material, higher standards make it harder for cities to turn a profit

BY ALEX HOSEY

Recycling programs around the country are feeling the negative effects of changes in the way recyclable waste is processed and who buys it.

In the face of declining revenue, some cities have limited their services and others have had to get rid of their recycling programs completely. Just three years ago, the city of West University Place generated upward of $10,000 from its recycling program. But by 2018, it was costing the city $83,000. In Bellaire, things are not much better. In 2015, the city generated almost $12,000 in recycling sales, whereas in 2017, recycling lost the city about $85,000.

“The global market for recycling is sort of an ominous, dark cloud,” Bellaire Public Works Director Mike Leech said.

From streets to creeks, the region rebuilds its resilience

BY MATT DULIN

Editor’s note: This is part of a series exploring efforts to make Houston a flood-resilient city.

A rolling park with 280 acres of lakes, trees, birding and a budding trail system sits just south of Meyerland.

“It has really blossomed,” said Bill Burhans, the conservation director for the Willow Waterhole Greenspace. “And everybody who sees it says the same thing: It has great potential for development.”

It also happens to be a massive flood-reduction project,
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To make a difference, recycle like you mean it

As a conscientious citizen, I like to do my part to help the environment. I conserve electricity, use less water and recycle, as I am sure many of us do. However, there is a little confusion as to what is recyclable.

My theory is when in doubt, go ahead and put it in the recycle bin. I wouldn’t want to my trash to end up in a landfill when it could have been recycled. But it turns out I may have been doing more harm than good.

In this issue we explore the growing complications and expenses cities are facing to continue recycling programs and some tips of how you can help.

We also discuss several of the flood projects in the area and break them down to show how these widespread measures will prevent future flooding in our local area.

With this fourth issue for the Bellaire-Meyerland-West University edition, I hope that we are proving to be an invaluable source for your local news. We want to continue to hear from you. You can always reach us with story ideas and suggestions at bmwnews@communityimpact.com.

P.S. We’re hiring! Check out our open positions at communityimpact.com/careers.

What is Atlas 14?

Living in Houston requires everyone to be flood-literate about things such as 100-year storms and flood plains. A term you might not have heard of but that is literally rewriting the book on flooding is Atlas 14, a rainfall analysis by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The study redefine the amount of rainfall that can be expected during an event based off of historical data. In Houston, a 100-year event, defined as a 1% chance of occurring in any given location in any year, is the equivalent of almost 5 inches within an hour or 18 inches in a day, which is about 35% higher than previous estimates. What that means is much more frequent storms, such as a 5- to 10-year event, with a 4% chance of occurring, also have higher rainfall, and more flood risk, associated with them.

This change could move the lines for 100-year and 500-year flood plains, but it also means the science closer matches what Houstonians know from experience: It does not take much rain to turn into a bad day for flooding.
NOW OPEN

1. The salad chain Sweetgreen opened its first Houston location at 2551 Amherst St., in the Rice Village, on July 23. The restaurant, one of almost 100 locations nationwide, is the first in Texas as well, with menu items drawing on locally sourced ingredients. 832-720-7500. www.sweetgreen.com

2. Mendocino Farms, a Los Angeles-based sandwich and salad shop, opened its first Houston location at 5510 Morningside Drive, on July 18, featuring a one-time partnership with award-winning local chef Chris Shepherd for the first month after the opening. Proceeds from the “Charity Sandwich”—pecan wood smoked bacon sausage, wedge slaw, red onions, tomato, roasted garlic aioli and served on a toasted brioche bun—will benefit Shepherd’s Southern Smoke Foundation. The restaurant offers a seasonal menu and will use locally sourced ingredients. www.mendocinofarms.com

3. Ouzo Bay, a Mediterranean-style seafood restaurant, opened July 10 at 4444 Westheimer Road, Ste. G130. The restaurant serves lunch, brunch and dinner, with a dress code enforced. 832-430-6610. www.ouzobay.com

4. Loch Bar opened June 17 at 4444 Westheimer Road, Ste. G. 110, Houston. A raw oyster bar with a lounge atmosphere, Loch Bar has a full menu and a robust whiskey lineup. 832-430-6601. www.lochbar.com

5. Public Storage unveiled an upgraded location at 10200 Main St., Houston, in June, as part of a broader corporate effort to upgrade and add facilities to the region. The company moved storage indoors, improved drainage and expanded capacity, according to a press release. The site offers climate-controlled and non-climate-controlled storage options with no contracts. 832-384-5170. www.publicstorage.com

6. Flower & Cream opened June 29, at 2617 W. Holcombe Blvd., Houston. The artisan ice cream shop makes all of its ice cream and baked goods in-house, including macaroons, ice cream sandwiches, donuts and cookies. It also offers vegan options and alcoholic ice cream for adults. 832-667-8412. www.facebook.com/flowerandcream

7. Dining and entertainment venue Five Central opened in mid-May at 2736 Virginia Ave., Houston. The venue has five distinct destinations: Jaxton’s World Flavors, a casual restaurant; Downing Street Social Club, a cigar bar; Elie, a wine bar and cafe that features live music; XX3 (23), a cocktail bar; and The Red Peacock, a restaurant and performance space. 832-831-0167. www.fivecentralhouston.com

8. Daiquiri Explosion, which sells a variety of frozen mixed drinks to-go and for events, is opening a location at 4904 W. Bellfort Ave., Houston, in early August. 713-853-9232

9. A new franchise location of fitness and weight loss studio, Max Challenge, is coming to 84 Braeswood Square, Houston, in September. The studio combines nutritional counseling, fitness classes and coaching to help clients reach their goals. A free trial class will be held 9 a.m. Aug. 11 at Godwin Park Community Center, 5101 Rutherford Drive, Houston. 281-745-2339.

10. Austin-based chain Torchy’s Tacos announced it would open Aug. 14 at 5537 Wesleyan St., Houston, with a soft opening event planned at 5 p.m. Aug. 12. This is the chain’s 55th location in Texas, and it has plans to open three more in the Houston area this year, according to a news release. www.torchiystacos.com

11. The fast-casual Indian food chain Tarka Indian Kitchen is expanding its Houston footprint and will open at 3701 S. Shepherd Drive in mid-November. The Austin-based chain opened a Heights area location in 2017. Its menu of curries, and it has plans to open three more in the Houston area this year, according to a news release. www.tarkaindiankitchen.com
COMING SOON TO THE WESTIN HOUSTON TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER HOTEL

A renovation of 25,000 square feet of retail space in the Westin Houston Texas Medical Center hotel has several new tenants opening this year, joining MOD Pizza and Poke in the Bowl as previously reported:

A National fast-casual chain Roti Modern Mediterraneo will open its first Houston location at 6602 Fannin St. www.roti.com.

B Longtime Houston po’boy shop Antone’s is building out a space at 6618 Fannin St. www.antones1962.com

C Smoothie bar Juiceland will open at 1703 Dryden Road. www.juiceland.com

D Bakery chain Susie Cakes is opening at 1705 Dryden Road. www.susiecakes.com

RELOCATIONS

12 Husband-and-wife duo Karen and James Fain will relocate their Tennessee-style barbecue restaurant, Fainmous BBQ, from 10400 S. Post Oak Road, Ste. E, Houston, to Sawyer Yards at 1201 Oliver St., Houston, by November. 713-728-9663. www.fainmousbbq.com

ANNIVERSARIES

13 Bernie’s Burger Bus marked five years as a brick-and-mortar restaurant at 5407 Bellaire Blvd., Ste A., Bellaire, in June. The business got its start as a food truck in 2010, and after its Bellaire location, it has since added restaurants in the Heights, Katy and Missouri City, as well as Reliant Stadium, serving playfully named burgers, fries and milkshakes. In July, the restaurant introduced new items including the Show & Tell Burger, Reunion Salad and Cheat Sheet Chips. 713-349-9400. www.berniesburgerbus.com

EXPANSIONS

14 Work began earlier this year at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church, 6800 Buffalo Speedway Houston, to construct a new prayer chapel. The Our Lady of Lourdes Chapel will seat 200 people and will be able to host daily masses, weddings and funerals, with an expected completion next spring. The church is also planning to replace two of its aging school buildings with a new facility breaking ground in 2020, funded by a $10.8 million capital campaign. The school has 500 students from Pre-K to 8th grade and celebrated its 75th anniversary this past school year. 713-667-9111. www.svdp-houston.org

RENOVATIONS

15 Lemongrass Cafe, 5107 Bellaire Blvd., Ste. 120, reopened Aug. 1 after closing in December for renovations. The restaurant, led by chef Fah Vorarittinapa, serves Asian-fusion cuisine. The renovation brings a new interior design to the entire restaurant. www.lemongrass-cafe.com

CLOSINGS

16 After opening in August 2018, Italian eatery Pizza Motus closed its doors on 6119 Edloe St., West University Place, as of July 22. The restaurant sold Roman-style pizza, sandwiches with homemade bread and salads. 832-767-3450. www.pizzamotus.com

17 Woven Arts, a shop specializing in East Asian rugs, furniture, home decor and gifts, closed its Rice Village shop at 2431 Rice Blvd., Houston, in May. 832-968-3959. www.wovenartsusa.com

IN THE NEWS

18 The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston and The Texas Health and Human Services Commission hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for the UHealth Continuum of Care Campus for Behavioral Health, a new state psychiatric hospital at 2800 S. MacGregor Way, Houston, on June 26. The state approved $125 million for the construction of the new facility, which will include a 240-bed hospital for patients in need of acute psychiatric care. The hospital is scheduled to be complete in 2022 and will be the largest academic psychiatric hospital in the country. www.hhs.texas.gov

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TO-DO LIST AUGUST

ATTEND A SCREENING OF ‘JUDGMENT AT NUREMBERG’
The Holocaust Museum Houston will host a screening of the 1961 Academy Award-winning film as a part of its Civil Society Film series. The courtroom drama takes place in 1947 and tells the story of four German judges facing a military tribunal for crimes against humanity and their involvement with the Nazi regime. 6:30-10 p.m. $10 (nonmembers), $8 (members and students). 5401 Caroline St., Houston. 713-942-8000. www.hmh.org

ENJOY LIVE TIBETAN MUSIC
Southern India’s Drepung Loseling Monastery will provide live dancing and music as a part of its “Sacred Music Sacred Dance for World Healing” show at the Asia Society Texas Center. Tibetan Buddhist robes, costumes, instruments and songs are featured in two performances, a matinee at 2-2:45 p.m. and a full showing from 7-8:30 p.m. Matinee $15 (members), $25 (nonmembers); main show $35 (members), $45 (nonmembers). 1370 Southmore Blvd., Houston. 713-496-9901. www.asiasociety.org

LEARN TO BELLY DANCE
The Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center of Houston will host an introduction to belly dancing workshop. Experienced dancer Sahira will teach the basics of one of the oldest dances in the world while also providing a low-intensity workout. 3-4:30 p.m. $12 (in advance), $16 (at the door). 5601 S. Braeswood Blvd., Houston. 713-667-1703. www.erjchouston.org

PARTY WITH ARTS PATRONS
The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston will host its annual Patron Circle Lawn Party to promote the museum and the arts. The party will have summer treats, live music and special access to exhibitions. Those who join the Patron Circle during the event will receive a discounted membership, a tote bag and an exhibition catalog. 5-7 p.m. Free. 5501 Bissonnet St., Bellaire. www.contemporaryart.org

DONATE TO BELLAIRE’S POLICE AND FIREFIGHTERS
The Bellaire Police and Fire Foundation is holding a fundraising benefit for the city’s public safety officers with a raffle and silent auction. All of the money raised from the event will go toward the BPFF. 5-7 p.m. Free. 5501 Bissonnet St., Bellaire. www.bellairepoliceandfirefoundation.org

SEE SARAH GRACE FROM ‘THE VOICE’ PERFORM
Sarah Grace, a 16-year-old indie and roots singer and a semifinalist from “The Voice,” will perform at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church as a part of its Coffee House Live series. Coffee and snacks will be provided. 7-9 p.m. The event is free, but donations to the church are welcome. 5308 Buffalo Speedway, Houston. 713-667-1703. www.sahouston.com

GET A BEHIND-THE-SCENES TOUR
The Houston Museum of Natural Science is providing a tour of its containment room and rooftop greenhouses—usually closed to the public—where staff care for the museum’s caterpillars, butterflies and other insects. Children over age 5 are welcome. $32 (nonmembers), $20 (members). 5555 Hermann Park Drive, Houston. 713-639-4629. www.hmns.org

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IN THE NEWS

Robert Fry, former mayor of West University Place, was formally appointed June 27 to the board of directors of the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County. Fry fills the seat vacated by Cindy Siegel, who announced a congressional campaign in April. He will represent the group of 14 smaller cities in METRO’s service area.

“I’m thankful to mayors of the 14 smaller cities and to the METRO board for their confidence in me. I look forward to working closely with fellow board members and staff as METRO meets the transportation needs of our growing region,” Fry said in a news release.

His term at METRO will last two years, and members can serve up to eight years total.

The board is expected to ask voters in November to allow the agency to borrow up to $3 billion to help cover the estimated $7.5 billion cost of the new METRONext Moving Forward Plan, which includes improvements throughout the transit system. The agency is not asking for a tax increase.

TRANSPORTATION UPDATES

Uptown Boulevard Project and bus rapid-transit line

Construction is making headway on the city’s first bus rapid-transit line, the Uptown BRT, as part of the Uptown Management District’s Boulevard Project. According to the district, new traffic signals are up and running in the north segment and will be operational along all of Post Oak Boulevard by the end of September. In addition, transit stations are under construction along Post Oak, with completion by Nov. 1.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County expects to launch METRORapid, the name for the BRT service, in March 2020.

Timeline: February 2017-December 2019

Cost: $130 million

Funding source: Uptown Management District

The new Uptown/Westpark Transit Center, south of Westpark and just outside I-610, is also under construction. The Texas Department of Transportation is building an elevated segment of bus lanes from Post Oak to North Post Oak Road along I-610, connecting to the Northwest Transit Center, which is being upgraded by METRO.

Linden and Willow streets and drainage project

The city of Bellaire has almost completed work on portions of Linden and Willow streets. The construction of the two streets involved replacing the existing roadways, adding portions of sidewalks, and adding underground drainage and detention storm sewer lines. The work is funded by the Bonds for Better Bellaire, approved by voters in 2016.

Timeline: Fall 2018-Fall 2019

Cost: part of $4.8 million allocated for Imperial, Mayfair, Linden and Willow streets reconstruction

Funding source: city of Bellaire

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BACK TO SCHOOL

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Mixed-use project seeks rezoning for apartments, retail, office space on former Chevron campus

BY ALEX HOSEY

The former Chevron campus could transform into a 12.75-acre commercial, retail and residential hub—if Bellaire’s Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council both sign off on the plans.

Development company SLS West Loop LP, the owner of the property since 2018, is requesting the rezoning of four-eight-zero-zero Fournace Place and five-nine-zero-one S. Rice Ave. from technical research park to corridor mixed-use to build retail and office buildings, a parking garage and a multifamily apartment complex.

At a public hearing held by the Bellaire Planning and Zoning Commission on July 11, residents had mixed reactions, with those in favor saying the space for businesses and recreation as well as affordable housing would benefit the city.

“If you don’t do multifamily, could you do all retail on that side [of the property]? The answer was no,” developer Danny Sheena said. “I don’t want to set up a development that will be a failure. ... Something has to support all of that development. If you don’t do a mixed-use that supports multifamily, you’re not setting it for the ... best use for that property.”

The company is also seeking a specific-use permit for a movie theater and athletic facility within about nine-six acres on the western side of the property as well as a specific-use permit to allow for an increase in the height of construction from 53 feet to 85 feet.

“We love living here, but we do miss having an area where in the evening you can go somewhere really close by and walk around,” resident Andrew Robinson said. “I like the way [the development] looks. I think it can add value to the city. Right now when people think of Bellaire, they think about it as a place that floods.”

Residents who spoke out against the development, many of whom live directly north of the property on Mayfair Street, raised concerns about the effects it would have on traffic, home values, the environment, flooding and the city’s image.

“For over 100 years, Bellaire was known as a safe haven and a good investment as the ‘City of Homes,’ partly because of our strict zoning,” resident Jane McNeel said. “What I consider to be poor choices and bad decisions have led to this latest attempt to cause distress to Bellaire residents and damage to the city’s image.”

The commission will vote Aug. 8 on whether to recommend approval to City Council, which would hold its own public hearing before voting on the developer’s requests.
Houston OKs $2 billion plan to remedy Clear Water Act violations

HOUSTON  City Council approved a 15-year, $2 billion plan July 24 to improve the city’s sewer systems and prevent persistent overflow problems. The decree also includes an immediate $4.6 million settlement payment from the city, most of which goes to the Environmental Protection Agency for Clean Water Act violations.

The decree will now go before a federal judge for approval and enters a 30-day public comment period before it is enacted.

The estimated $150 million per-year increase in public works funds dedicated to sewer system improvements will be funded by increased water rates, Mayor Sylvester Turner said. An ongoing rate study will wrap up by January, and new rates will be applied to water bills in April, said Carol Hadlock, director of the Houston Public Works Department. The EPA defines water bills below 2% of a city’s median income as affordable, Hadlock said.

“The city of Houston is currently closer to 1% of median household incomes, and even with the scheduled cost of the scheduled adjustments that are part of the rate study that we’re going into, we expect to be significantly below the 2% at the end of the 15 years,” she said. “At this point, everything has every indication that we had those that will still be well within the realm.”

The decree requires the city to perform an assessment of sanitary sewer overflow issues and whether they necessitate greater drainage capacity within the system, which includes 6,000 miles of sewers and 39 treatment plants. It also requires the city to conduct a conditions assessment of the wastewater collection system every 10 years as well as a conditions assessment of wastewater treatment plants every five years.

More requirements include a sewage system cleaning plan to prevent overflow issues and the implementation of over 3,000 “smart manhole covers,” which digitally monitor for potential overflow issues.

Proposed Bellaire budget calls for 8% property tax increase ahead of new cap

Bellaire  A proposed budget for fiscal year 2019-20 calls for an 8% increase in property taxes from existing properties, according to a presentation given by City Manager Paul Hofmann to Bellaire City Council at its July 15 meeting.

“I’m asking you to go to the current max on a property tax rate increase for fiscal ’20.” Hofmann told the council. “I’m also asking you to make that decision in light of what we think will happen in fiscal ’24, and I’m going to do that fully recognizing that none of you will probably be on the City Council in fiscal ’24, but I am convinced that it is the fiscally correct thing for us to do.”

To generate the additional revenue, the city would need to adopt a tax rate of $0.4556 per $100 in valuation, about a 5.6% overall rate increase over the 2019 rate of $0.4313.

Starting next year, tax increases resulting in 3.5% more revenue in small cities can be challenged by a petition calling for an election, per a new state law.

Even with an 8% increase, city staff’s forecast shows its 60-day reserve requirements would drop by $440,000 by fiscal year 2024. If a 3.5% increase were approved this year instead, the drop was projected to be about $3.61 million. The fund reserve for fiscal year 2019 was about $3.67 million.

“According to this budget, we’ll end fiscal ’20 with a healthy reserve, but we’ll immediately start eroding away that reserve into fiscals ’21, ’22, ’23 and ’24. We won’t be balanced in future years without that [increase],” Hofmann said.

Public hearings and workshops will take place before any action is taken, with Oct. 21 set as the date when a tax increase could be approved by the council.

RAISING REVENUE

City staff are recommending a tax increase to generate 8% more operations and maintenance revenue in FY 2020.

DEBT SERVICE

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OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

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Total proposed increase in tax rate +5.63%

SOURCE: CITY OF BELLAIRE/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

CITY HIGHLIGHTS

BELLAIRE The city received a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Disaster Recovery Program on July 15. The grant, valued at about $250,000, will be used to improve drainage and flood mitigation on Cynthia Street.

WEST UNIVERSITY On July 8, the city entered into a $50,000 agreement with engineering firm HT&J LLC to represent the city’s interests and review the Harris County Flood Control District’s designs for improving Poor Farm Ditch.

HOUSTON The Houston Professional Fire Fighters Association and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner re-entered court-ordered mediation Aug. 1 in an attempt at resolving the parties’ dispute over Proposition B, both parties confirmed July 17. Attorney Daryl Bristow is serving as the mediator.

NUMBER TO KNOW

47% of streets in West University have underground drainage that does not meet the city’s two-year capacity standard, according to a drainage study.

MEETINGS

Bellaire City Council meets on the first and third Monday of the month at 7 p.m. at 7008 S. Rice Ave., Bellaire.

West University Place City Council meets on the second and fourth Monday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at 3800 University Blvd., Houston.

Houston City Council meets weekly at 1:30 p.m. Tuesdays for public comment and 9 a.m. Wednesdays for regular business at 901 Bagby St., Houston.
In the corner of the Frost Bank office building in Bellaire sits a pair of black leather boots with the Great American Seal and the number 41 stitched in gold. This pair of boots was worn by George H.W. Bush and given to the Wiesenthal family after Harold Wiesenthal, the owner of Harold’s in the Heights, tailored the president’s suit for his inauguration day.

After Harold’s in the Heights closed in 2011 after 61 years of business, the boots, along with the family’s legacy of fine men’s clothing and tailoring, now reside within M. Wiesenthal Men’s Collection, a business started seven years ago by Harold’s son, Michael.

“I started working at Harold’s when I was 16, and I just loved everything about it,” Wiesenthal said. “I guess I just inherited a gene from my ancestors that said I was born to be a merchant.”

Throughout M. Wiesenthal’s are a wide collection of coats, shirts, belts, shoes and ties varying in size and style. All of them are ingredients for making an outfit that inspires confidence in the wearer, such as the first tailored suit that Wiesenthal remembers wearing.

“It felt different, I walked differently, I carried myself differently and it gave me this confidence level that was magic when I put that suit on,” Wiesenthal said. “It was handmade, and it was custom-fitted to me. I felt like Superman. The right clothing, the right fit, the right accessories and so forth—they give a person confidence.”

Wiesenthal offers high-end men’s formal wear, made-to-fit options for shirts, a selection of sportswear and tailoring and measuring services to ensure that customers get a suit or coat that fits their body and style.

Wiesenthal said the most important quality for a clothier to have is integrity when helping customers find the clothing that works best for them and to make sure it fits just right. The clothier said he takes pride in doing a good job when outfitting the men that come into his store.

“I’m not going to sell something to someone that doesn’t fit,” Wiesenthal said. “My best advertising is somebody walking out of here well-dressed and somebody out in public saying, ‘Hey, you look great. Where’d you buy that suit?’”

M. Wiesenthal Men’s Collection continues the family legacy of fine tailoring.
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Tamales Don Pepe
Family-owned restaurant brings authentic Mexican cuisine to Meyerland

Rene Hidalgo has a lifelong passion for cooking. He would cook his own meals even as a child in Mexico City, and when he was 14 years old, he operated a hamburger stand all by himself. When Hidalgo was 20, he traveled to California to study English and tourism and had gotten a job as a dishwasher for Hyatt Hotels.

“My idea was just to learn English and then come back, but when I started to work in the kitchen, I liked it a lot, so I just decided to stay and work full time,” Hidalgo said.

By 1991, Hidalgo had been promoted to a cook and transferred to the downtown Hyatt Hotel in Houston before opening his own restaurants: Maria Selma, Tortas El Angel and, on Cinco De Mayo of 2018, Tamales Don Pepe.

“My wife and I decided to start this new business because it’s close to home, and we wanted something more personal. Something small with, like, three customers. The way it’s supposed to be,” Hidalgo said. “So far people have been happy here. They like the service; they like the food.”

Tamales Don Pepe serves authentic Mexican food for both breakfast and lunch, with familiar options such as quesadillas and enchiladas to a wide variety of tamales, all with an emphasis on affordability.

“There’s a need for more authentic and affordable Mexican food,” Hidalgo said. “There are a couple of restaurants in the city that are authentic but more expensive. There’s no other place I know that cooks like we do at our prices.”

Hidalgo said many of the customers who come into Tamales Don Pepe are returning customers of different nationalities, which he attributes to the authentic quality of his cooking and the friendly atmosphere for which Tamales Don Pepe is known.

“We are doing so much better in our first year than we’ve done in two or three years in the previous restaurants,” Hidalgo said. “I’m happy to be here, and I love this place.”

Three things to try at Tamales Don Pepe

FOR THE HUNGRY SPICE LOVER

The quesadillas ($4.50) come with the choice of mushrooms, tinga, desebrada, pastor or rajas con papas. Blue corn option for $0.50 extra, huitlacoche or flor de calabaza options for $1 extra.

FOR THOSE WHO LIKE VARIETY

The handmade tamales ($2 each) weigh 6 ounces and come in different varieties, including chicken with green sauce, chicken with red sauce, pork with green sauce, black beans and queso, rajas con queso and vegetarian mushroom.

FOR THOSE WHO LIKE THE CLASSICS

The green enchiladas (3 for $8.95) are filled with chicken, topped with onions, cilantro and cheese and served with rice and beans. Red and mole options are also available for the same price.
FLOOD RESILIENCY
PROJECTS IN BRAYS BAYOU WATERSHED

Hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent as city and county leaders look to improve the area’s capacity to withstand flooding.

HARRIS COUNTY’S $2.5 BILLION BOND
A BOOST TO FLOOD INFRASTRUCTURE

Last August, 85% of Harris County voters supported a bond to accelerate regional drainage improvements.

Houston’s Pay-As-You-Go Approach

The “Rebuild Houston” ordinance, first passed in 2010 and reaffirmed in 2018, includes a mix of property taxes, developer impact fees and drainage fees, which comprise the city’s Dedicated Drainage and Street Renewal Fund, or DD&SRF.

A substantial portion of the fund is used to pay down debt from previous capital projects, with the goal of eventually freeing up more cash for future projects. It also has a separate Storm Water Fund, largely used for maintenance activities.

Stormwater Spending

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>2018</th>
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Drainage and Street Spending

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<th>2018</th>
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<td>$228M</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONTINUED FROM 1

The city’s storm drain systems are designed to handle a 2-year event as the standard, equivalent to about 2.25 inches of rain in an hour, though they become overwhelmed in more intense storms, said Jeff WeATHERford, the director of transportation and drainage operations for Houston Public Works.

“When you get bigger events like that, we kind of use the streets to hold water,” Weatherford said. “If I don’t put water in the roads, it will go in people’s houses. There’s nowhere else to put it. I would rather flood every road to keep water out of one person’s house.”

Unfortunately, not every road is well suited for drainage, and nearly every capital project to address streets also includes a drainage component—usually moving away from ditches to underground flows, Weatherford said.

With around $100 million a year from the city’s drainage fee for projects, but with a street and drainage rebuild costing $12 million a mile, it can only go so far, he said. As the fee slowly reduces the city’s capital project debt, it should free up more cash—and more capacity to borrow—in the long run, he said.

As frequent as street flooding can be—over 12,000 reports were logged on Houston’s 311 nonemergency hotline from 2015-18—it remains understudied and poorly understood, said Sam Brody, a Texas A&M University flood researcher who published a study in November in partnership with the University of Maryland, one of the first to examine the implications of flooding in dense cities.

“It may not have as much immediate impact, but the long-term chronic impact could be significant,” he said. “If the streets are flooded or your car is flooded, that’s how you get to school, to work, or to the dialysis center.”

This type of flood risk is not well communicated unless you know an area from experience, he said.

Space Race

Inside the heavily developed Inner Loop, the flood control district’s options are limited. There are virtually no buyout candidates and very little opportunity for large detention ponds. But lots of other opportunities exist, said Christof Spieler, a researcher with the Greater Houston Flood Mitigation Consortium, such as the North Canal project, which would create a bypass where White Oak and Buffalo bayous meet.

“That could reduce flooding in that area by several feet alone,” Spieler said.

That project, at an estimated $100 million, is one of the priciest on the district’s bond-funded capital plan.

With large tracts of land unavailable, another solution is to think smaller.

“With microdetention, you could have several little pieces...
of land rather than one large pond,” he said. “Existing development, such as schools and service centers, could be retrofitted with this approach—another opportunity that has not yet been looked at fully.”

A study of this option is in the flood district’s plan, but Zeve concedes his options are limited.

“Two things are true about land inside the Loop: It never gets cheaper, and they never make more of it. And developers move quicker than us, so while we want to get to it before they do, it’s often just not practical,” Zeve said.

The flood control district’s projects in Houston’s more suburban areas will have downstream benefits, he said.

GREENWAYS—AND NEW WAYS OF THINKING

Efforts to bring attention to Houston’s bayous and natural channels have been growing, in part thanks to Bayou Greenways 2020, an effort that kicked off in 2012 with the help of a $100 million bond and private fundraising. While its main focus was to create bayou parks—as they were originally envisioned a century ago—the second main benefit is flood reduction, said Chip Place, the managing director of capital programs for the Houston Parks Board.

“The Dutch have an expression, ‘Make room for the river.’ You need that additional green buffer where you can make room for the bayou, which is basically a slow-moving river,” Place said.

The program has set out to acquire as much bayou-adjacent land as possible while also improving the use of existing bayous through trails and parks, which brings even more attention to their role as a natural resource, he said.

A wider view of what constitutes infrastructure is needed, Brody said.

“These are complex problems that can’t be solved through engineering alone. It has to do with people and behavior and things happening at a larger scale,” Brody said. His research team is looking at ways to make street flood information more readily available so drivers can anticipate and reroute their commutes, for example.

Both researchers and bayou advocates agree: Aside from new initiatives, more attention and funding for maintenance will also go a long way.

“We are underfunded on maintenance. That’s an issue on storm sewers but also open ditches,” Spieler said. “There’s infrastructure that’s been forgotten.”

Marcy Williams, the president of the Brays Oaks Super Neighborhood, points out residents in flood-prone areas need to do their part now that big projects are making a difference.

“The streets flood and they drain, better than they used to,” Williams said. “But this is one of our biggest problems: trash in drains. We’ve got to help the water flow.”
While many of the changes in recycling rates across the globe can be attributed to Chinese trade policy, there are still factors down to the individual level that could make or break the future of local recycling programs.

“The future is changing, but don’t give up on recycling,” said Jordan Fengel, executive director of the State of Texas Alliance for Recycling. “There’s a lot of work to do, but it has to be done, and I don’t foresee recycling going away.”

THE GREEN WALL

One of the largest difficulties for American recycling programs has been changes in China’s policy for importing recycled materials globally. According to officials from Waste Management, a company that is one of the largest processors of recycling in the country and the seventh-largest exporter of all goods by volume in the U.S., China used to consume 50% of all paper and plastic recycled in the world, with 13.2 million tons a year being imported from the U.S. alone.

With the passing of China’s National Sword policy, mixed paper and plastic imports are now banned, with the country to potentially halt imports of all international recycled materials by 2020. For Waste Management, this meant a decrease in exports to China for fiber recyclables from around 27% in 2017 to less than 5% in 2018.

“Because of this, recyclers are continuing to build alternative markets and move materials to other places on the globe,” said Sherrell Cordas, a public affairs senior specialist for Waste Management.

Before completely halting imports of recycling, China has drastically increased its standards in quality for the materials they will accept by only purchasing recyclables with a contamination rate of no more than 0.5%.

“From the simple commodity perspective, as I see it, they’ve been taking a lot of junk. They went from accepting 20% contaminated material, meaning if you had a 100-pound block of plastic, 20% of it could be junk,” Leech said. “Now it’s half of 1%. You basically have to process the recycling before you send it, and it just skyrockets the price.”

The increase in quality requirements coupled with the heavily reduced demand for recyclables in the global market means that the cost for processing recycled goods goes up, while the market value for the processed materials goes down.

At the local level, these changes make it more difficult for cities to recoup the costs of their curbside or single-stream recycling services.

“Today’s estimate, we’re looking at about $100,000 to pay to get rid of it,” said Dave Beach, West University Place’s city manager. “We are now paying to take our recycling to a wholesaler and paying them to take it.”

RECYCLING AT HOME

Even though the average person can do little to influence China’s policy changes, the factor they can most directly influence is a city’s contamination rate, or the measure of how much nonrecyclable material becomes mixed into recycling.

According to Waste Management’s estimates, the average contamination rate measured in their materials recovery facilities is about 25%, meaning one-fourth of the recycling it receives ends up in a landfill because it is either nonrecyclable or the material is in no condition to be recycled.

Cities such as Bellaire and West University Place have contamination rates well below the national average at 16% and 9%, respectively, though Beach said contaminated recycling bins are still common to come across.

“If you’re ever in an area where there are recycling bins, just pop open the lid and look in there. ... You’ll have food thrown in with the recycling,” Beach said. “In all honesty, if staff looks in a container and it’s contaminated, it’s not worth the money and the time to try and sort it and clean it. If you look at a container and it’s kind of full of contaminated recycling, it’s going to go in the trash, plain and simple.”

Contamination leads to higher costs to sort, clean and process material to sell to buyers. In other words, the messier a person is when it comes to recycling, the more damage they do to their own government’s ability to collect their recycling and keep their local recycling programs alive.

“The quality of materials entering the marketplace plays a huge factor in the continuation of recycling programs. Good-quality materials help keep costs down and allow the materials to become feedstock used by mills,” Cordas said. “Residents should focus on recycling clean and dry bottles, cans, paper and cardboard in order to provide quality feedstock to the market that mills can use instead of virgin resources.”

Besides keeping one’s recycling dry and clean, the best way to reduce contamination is by learning what a city’s recycling program accepts and does not accept in their bins or curbside pickup.

“We try to remind people as much as possible, but sometimes people still get it wrong,” Leech said. “They’re trying to do the right thing, but I think a lot of that messaging is going to change. It used to be, ‘When in doubt, recycle,’ but now it’s ‘When in doubt, throw it out.’”

THE FUTURE

Although recycling revenue has decreased significantly over the past few years in cities such as Bellaire and West University Place, their recycling programs, at least for the near future, will continue.

“The Houston market hasn’t been as badly affected as other markets throughout the country,” Leech said. “I’ve heard about a couple of communities that have had to cut their recycling programs dead. ... We’re not even close to that.”

Fengel said that the future of recycling programs could flourish if businesses in the U.S. were able to start buying the recycled materials that were previously sold to China.

“The crisis is really a beaming opportunity for Texas to become one of the major inlets and outlets of materials in the nation,” Fengel said. “We could really handle a lot of America’s issues with recyclables if we were able to help companies use recycled materials.”

If the downward trend of recycling costs continue, citizens of Bellaire and West University Place could see an increase in their utility billing fees to keep up with the costs, unlike the city of Houston, which funds its recycling and trash collection programs using a portion of property taxes. If the costs become too great to keep recycling programs alive, governments could decide to limit or discontinue services.

“The question really gets down to, ‘What’s the...
threshold?’ That would be for the community to decide and the elected policy board,” Beach said. “The good news is West U has had a long-term commitment to recycling since ’72. It’s a priority for the council to look at being green.”

For more information, visit communityimpact.com

STEP THREE
CHECKING FOR CONTAMINATION

Contaminated contents are not able to be recycled and are thrown in a landfill. Higher contamination rates lead to increased costs in processing recycling.

THE GREEN WALL

China previously consumed about half of the world’s recycled plastic and paper. The country has now raised its quality standards for materials and plans on halting all recycling imports in 2020.

PREVIOUS MAXIMUM CONTAMINATION RATE ACCEPTED BY CHINA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Average</th>
<th>Bellaire Average</th>
<th>West University Average</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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</table>

20% New Maximum 0.5%

IF YOU LOOK AT A CONTAINER AND IT’S KIND OF FULL OF CONTAMINATED RECYCLING, IT’S GOING TO GO IN THE TRASH, PLAIN AND SIMPLE.

—Dave Beach, West University Place city manager

RECYCLED MATERIAL BUYERS CHANGE IN PERCENTAGE OF IMPORTS FROM 2017-18

Waste Management has had to greatly shift where it ships recycled materials to, as exporting to China has become more difficult.

The crisis is really a beaming opportunity for Texas to become one of the major inlets and outlets of materials in the nation.

—Jordan Fengel, executive director of the State of Texas Alliance for Recycling

SOURCES: CITY OF BELLAIRE, CITY OF WEST UNIVERSITY PLACE, WASTE MANAGEMENT/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

STEP THREE
THE CRISIS IS REALLY A BEAMING OPPORTUNITY FOR TEXAS TO BECOME ONE OF THE MAJOR INLETS AND OUTLETS OF MATERIALS IN THE NATION.

—Jordan Fengel, executive director of the State of Texas Alliance for Recycling

SOURCES: CITY OF BELLAIRE, CITY OF WEST UNIVERSITY PLACE, WASTE MANAGEMENT/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

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MAY SALES DATA

HOMES ON THE MARKET

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MEDIAN PRICE OF HOMES SOLD

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HOMES SOLD

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REAL ESTATE

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

JUNE SALES DATA

HOMES SOLD

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<tr>
<th>Number of homes sold</th>
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<tr>
<td>3 bed / 2 bath</td>
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<tr>
<td>2,225 sq. ft.</td>
<td>$476,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAPLEWOOD

Maplewood is a deed-restricted neighborhood in the Meyerland area with around 520 homes, most built in the 1950s and 1960s. The neighborhood has a homeowners association, the Maplewood Civic Club, which oversees services, including a constable patrol. Nearby neighborhoods with the same name have separate associations and amenities, such as Maplewood North/South.

Attractions nearby: Maplewood Mall shopping center, Meyerland Plaza, Brays Bayou Greenway Trail

Schools (HISD): Elrod Elementary School, Parker Elementary, Herod Elementary School, Fondren Middle School, Long Academy Middle School, Bellaire High School

Square footage: 1,578-3,681

Home values: $108,000-$585,000

Median list price per square foot: $135.90

Homes sold within the past year: 99

Median days on the market: 32

Heritage data provided by Heritage Texas Properties 800.856.7797 • www.heritagetexas.com

RECENT LISTINGS

5474 Jackwood St.

3 bed / 2 bath
Berkshire Hathaway
Rose Shook
254-498-2720

5566 Beechnut St.

3 bed / 2 bath
SWE Homes
Dan Cook
713-231-1125

5463 Grape St.

3 bed / 2 bath
$475,000
Martha Turner Sotheby's International Realty
Terry Cominsky
713-623-8899

5646 Sylmar Road

4 bed / 2 bath
Greenwood King
Kristin Tillman
713-942-6881
DEALS THIS MONTH

AUTOMOTIVE
Uptown Automotive .................................. 23

BEAUTY
Wigs by Andre ........................................... 23

CHILDREN’S
Blue Leaf .................................................... 23
The Little Gym ........................................... 23

DINING
Auntie Pasto’s Restaurant .......................... 21

HEALTH AND WELLNESS
Tranquility Dental Spa ................................ 23
ACU4U ...................................................... 23

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Saturday
4pm—11pm

Friday
11am—11pm

Sunday
4pm—9pm
Harris County gets $4.5 billion in federal funds for flood-control projects

Harris County has acquired about $4.5 billion in federal funds for flood prevention projects across the area, bringing the county close to solving its numerous flooding issues, officials said Monday. U.S. Rep. John Culberson, R-Houston, Harris County Judge Ed Emmett and Russ Poppe, Harris County Flood Control District executive director, held a press conference Monday at the Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish...
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