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## OUR VIEWPOINT: Caution is good when protecting coast

By Alec Woolsey Nov 29, 2018 Updated 7 hrs ago



Engineer Steve Matula inspects the removal of dirt and debris from the exit gate May 15 at the Velasco Drainage District's East Levee Pump Station.

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When it's a matter of when, not if, the next big storm heads for the Texas Coast, it is easy to get in a rush for solutions.

And its even easier when that solution has been trapped in the meeting room-stages for nearly a decade, but it sounds like action is actually going to happen soon after the Army Corps of Engineers released its proposal for a coastal spine project along the Texas Gulf Coast.

But Velasco Drainage officials pumped the brakes before signing off on an agreement for the project, saying they wanted time to consider the project.

Although it might be frustrating to people wanting solutions, this is likely the right path forward.

According to County Judge Matt Sebesta, the part of the project that would affect Brazoria County would focus on levees that currently help to protect Dow Chemical Co.

“It is modernizing the levee system that is pretty much the Velasco Drainage District. It would be improving their levee system,” he said.

The price tag on that has been reported as being in the ballpark of \$4 billion, and that big “b” should give officials pause. Not because it’s unreasonable for a project of this magnitude, but because the local share is a lot of dollars to commit.

And for the district, that takes a bit of patience.

If the drainage district spends money before the memorandum of understanding is adopted, then they can’t accumulate costs related to the project to put toward its share, Kidwell told The Facts. If approved, the understanding would not decide any pending finances or project designs yet, he said.

“I can’t recommend approval on it the way we got it right now,” Kidwell said during the drainage board’s discussion of the agreement.

This may be holding up the design phase of the coastal spine project, but it's necessary and other entities will likely do the same. The design phase of the project begins after agreements are made, and the construction won't begin until two to three years after that phase is completed.

This is a long-term project that is going to take in billions from the federal government and millions from local entities to build, and it will require cooperation along the coast as the very nature of storm protection is reshaped.

That's not something that should be rushed through a brief meeting, and not pushing a decision is a responsible move by the board.

Solutions will take years to be implemented, so let's not take minutes to make a decision.

This editorial was written by Alec Woolsey, assistant managing editor for The Facts.