The Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD) held a continuation hearing regarding Project No. 39, Georgetown Flood Control Levees, on Thursday, May 31, 2012, in the Georgetown Community Center. BRRWD Managers present included, Gerald Van Amburg, Curtis M. Nelson, Breanna Paradeis Kobiela, and Roger Ellefson. Others attending included: Bruce E. Albright, BRRWD Administrator and Houston Engineering, Inc. (H.E.); Gabe Bladow, Engineer, H.E.; Appraiser Eddie Bernhardson; Trevor Sorensen, Acting Mayor, City of Georgetown; Don Culp and David Wambach, Georgetown City Council; and Tami Sather, Georgetown City Clerk. Also attending: Brian Witthoeft, Lester and Joan Sorenson, Cindy Culp, Janet Carson, Rosalie Gable, Karen Clark, John David Lee, David J. Lee, Betty Sorenson, Michael Greywind, Charles Prather, Darrel Floberg, Carol Wambach, and Jen Stordahl.

BRRWD Chairman Gerald L. Van Amburg called the hearing to order at 8:00 PM. Van Amburg stated this was a continuation from the April 17, 2012 hearing. At that hearing the Engineer’s Report and the Appraisers’ Report were presented. He informed the audience that additional easements have since been signed and that others were still in various stages of negotiation. He called for audience support of the project in order for work to begin. Van Amburg asked if there were questions or comments from the audience.

Albright informed the audience that the hearing is being recorded to assist in the preparation of the minutes, which will be on file in the BRRWD office. He noted that members of the audience having questions should state their name for the record and that a sign-up sheet was being circulated.

David Lee commented on treating landowners equally and he felt there has been discrepancy. He questioned why the project hasn’t progressed when half the houses have been bought out. He wants the project to move forward. Someone questioned why the process has taken so long and asked whether it was the Board or Engineering at fault. It appears that Georgetown isn’t given the attention of other projects. Van Amburg stated the Board was ready to move forward but outstanding easements and land acquisition issues are delaying progress.

Albright offered the option of condemnation in response to a landowner’s concern about project delays. He continued by saying a list of landowners who have not yet signed has been prepared and could be addressed at tonight’s hearing so community members would know who have not signed. Brian Witthoeft stated that it appeared someone has dropped the ball and that all landowners should have been contacted. Albright confirmed there was one landowner who has not been contacted but his particular lot is not needed.

Ellefson reflected on the last hearing and the lack of audience support of the project. He charged those present to let the Board know if they truly wanted the project to progress. Ellefson stated there have been no comments received saying the protection wasn’t wanted. He said he wanted all the easements signed before the project was ordered in. Incurring additional expenses, like the condemnation process,
does affect the final cost of the project. Albright added the local project cost share was calculated at $72,400 by the State of Minnesota and is based on the 2 percent median household income threshold. The Appraisers have assessed this fixed amount to the remaining properties in Georgetown.

Albright identified those who have not yet signed their easements and gave an explanation of specific circumstances. Time was taken to go through the list of easements and land acquisitions and each individual's circumstances were discussed. Several property issues have been resolved and most of the others are nearing completion. Albright and Bladow addressed concerns about construction damages outside of the easement areas which would be covered under the contractor’s bond. Albright stated he felt all issues could be worked through and there was nothing preventing the progress of the proposed project. Albright informed the audience that if the Board orders in the project, there is a 30-day appeal process. During that time, bids can be advertised for construction. Albright would then send the revised budget to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Brian Witthoeft asked about adding clay to the existing dike, if the project does not get approved. Ellefson asked the audience if anyone in attendance did not support the project. An audience member stated she felt the assumption was that it would be built. Motion by Ellefson to make the Final Order for the Georgetown Levee improvement. Seconded by Paradeis Kobiela. Approved. Van Amburg announced the order of the project and the beginning of the appeal period. He invited those who had easements to sign, to do so after the hearing. Albright was asked what would happen if easements were not signed. He explained that the Board could make a determination when condemnation proceeding should begin. Albright also explained the bid process and the requirements for completion. He also addressed questions about funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) which had been negotiated by the City for repairs from the 2011 spring flood. Bladow added that replacing clay in the ball diamond area and other FEMA related projects can be added into the construction plans. Albright asked for a copy of the City’s FEMA paperwork. He added that FEMA related issues and project issues would be kept separate but can be done by the same contractor.

Albright thanked the citizens of Georgetown for their patience. Van Amburg asked if there were additional questions. Jen Stordahl summarized the take-aways for the City as the vacant Engstrom lot, working with H.E. on a lot for Michael Greywind, and the FEMA paperwork. Bladow will follow up with Greywind.

There were no additional questions or comments and the hearing was adjourned at 8:50 PM.

Respectfully prepared and submitted by

Bruce E. Albright, BRRWD Administrator