

## Deal or no deal

# DD6 bargains with property owners for access to private land

Jefferson County Drainage District No. 6 (DD6) has been working on several projects around the area to improve drainage throughout their district by widening channels to increase flow and reduce flooding. Before DD6 ever even begins projects like these, however, they need easement to utilize privately owned land so employees can freely enter and get to work widening drainage ditches.

In some cases, DD6 has the required property appraised and pays the private owners for access to the acreage based on that appraisal, but most of the time, said General Manager Dr. Joseph Majdalani, people donate the land in order to benefit the communities in which they live. When they donate the acreage necessary for a DD6 project, it could end up as more of a trade, he explained, as the district may grant reasonable requests from property owners, like in the case of the ongoing Byrd Gully Relief Project.

“Sometimes people want to be paid the appraised value, but about 80-90% of the time, people give us the easement and just want a fence or a driveway or a culvert, something like that,” he described, which he says is a lot easier, faster and more cost-efficient than condemning the land and taking it anyway



DD6 workers clear and widen a crossing along Byrd Gully.

— deal or no deal. “If they work with us, they are just giving us easement, which means they still have access to it. If we have to condemn the property, then we

own it and they cannot set foot on it. We don’t want to condemn it. That is our last resort.”

According to Majdalani, DD6 has nearly completed its Byrd Gully Relief Project, a drainage improvement project on Ditch 1205, beginning at Dishman Road and ending at Pine Island Bayou, serving a large, unincorporated area north of Beaumont that experiences flooding during heavy rain events. The estimated \$711,800 project is fully funded by state and federal grant monies provided by FEMA’s Flood Mitigation Assistance Program and the Texas Economic Stabilization Fund, which are administered through the Texas Water Development Board. The project includes deepening and widening the drainage channel and upsizing six main channel crossings.

Majdalani asserted, “The scale of this project is massive... The proposed improvements will significantly increase the channel’s flow capacity and greatly reduce flow restrictions at chan-

nel crossings.”

The plan for Byrd Gully, said Project Manager John Murff, was to widen crossings to improve flow in bottlenecked locations. In order to do that, he successfully negotiated with multiple property owners whose land the ditch runs through in order to gain access.

“This project was about 7,000-8,000 feet of ditch. It was widening the ditch, which required getting more right-of-way. Gentry Road is this little stretch right here,” he said pointing at a map. “There were probably 10 landowners affected on this stretch of the project.

“About 3,000 feet of this ditch ran across one property, so that was the biggest one. We built him a rock road of limestone that was a little over 2,500 feet in exchange for that easement.”

The landowner in question donated approximately 6.86 acres, appraised at \$10,000 per acre reportedly based on the sale cost of similar properties and adjacent property value assessed by Cook & Associates Inc. of Beaumont. Based on that appraisal, easement access would cost DD6 \$68,590, Murff said. Building the rock road cost approximately \$56,660, a savings of \$11,930 to DD6 and to taxpayers, he estimated. And, he added, that doesn’t even include the saved money in the form of additional labor that would have been expended by having to haul more than 1,000 loads of dredged materials to the landfill or a dump site, not to mention creating additional traffic and stress on county roads stretched by the heavy dump trucks.

“Every time you put trucks on the road, you stress the pavement,” Majdalani agreed. “You have to drive all the way to the landfill, through traffic. Why waste the time and money if this property owner will allow us to put it here and make a road out of it? We try to spend our time and money wisely.”

With that goal in mind, Murff made multiple deals along Gentry Road for access to Byrd Gully.

“We worked a deal with this land owner to build him a fence for his part of the right-of-way,” he said pointing to another property along Gentry.



DD6 workers finish up a private road built in exchange for easement.

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### Cleared and widened crossings along Byrd Gully

According to Murff, it was also quite a bargain because it would have cost a lot more to buy the land from the owner than it cost to furnish improvements. "He didn't want anything else, so we came out way in the positive on that one. The guy on the other side donated his for free. He just wanted us to spread the dirt out on his property."

"People sometimes ask me, why are you doing this for them? Why are you building them a road, or why are you building them a fence? Well, because they gave us \$40,000 of land and they wanted \$3,000 worth of fence. We save a lot of money that way," Murff explained. "We will work with anybody and everybody. We never build improvements outside our easement unless we have an approved letter of agreement in place. We don't make a deal where the value of requested improvements to a property exceeds the appraised value, and the board has to approve every deal

we make."

"Most of the citizens are concerned about using taxpayer dollars, so they go out of their way to help us," Majdalani reiterated.

Because DD6 crews had access to Ditch 1205, aka Byrd Gully, they were able to widen the smallest crossing from one smaller pipe to three larger pipes, and expand some sections up to six pipes wide.

"We used to have one 36-inch or 42-inch pipe in certain locations," said Majdalani. "We took that one pipe out and replaced it with at least three 60-inch pipes in those locations."

The Byrd Gully Relief Project is currently in the last phase of construction and is scheduled to be completed by the end of March 2022. For more information about DD6 and drainage projects under its umbrella, visit the district's website at [dd6.org](http://dd6.org).

— Sharon Brooks



DD6 workers prepare to widen this ditch crossing from one smaller pipe to three larger pipes.

# Amanda deserved a little something extra.

## Or two.



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