

City Council approves \$4.1 million to replace old storm drain

January 3, 2020



A \$4-million project to improve Crescent City's aging storm drain system was authorized Dec. 23 during a special session of the City Council. Mayor pro tem Heidi Kime was not present to vote.

The project will center on storm drain capacity on Front and C streets.

Permanent improvements to Front Street are listed as the Del Norte County Local Transportation Commission's No. 1 priority for the city.

The current storm drain system is the oldest infrastructure system still in use within the Crescent City limits, estimated to be more than 70 years old, according to a staff report.

The existing storm drains have proven inadequate and result in frequent flooding of major collector streets, including Front and Fifth, in addition to a variety of intersections and even certain residential properties.

During heavy rains, emergency responders from the police and fire departments and from Crescent City Public Works must place barricades and post signs on flooded streets and intersections, warning residents and occasionally rescuing stranded motorists.

The staff report said flooding has caused thousands of dollars in damage to local properties and in some cases forced residents to temporarily evacuate their homes.

To pay for the project, said City Manager Eric Wier, a community development block grant awarded in 2017 for just under \$4.1 million will be used.

However, the grant does not cover all of the proposed storm drain improvements, including the capacity to handle a 10-year storm on local minor streets, a 25-year storm on major collector streets, and a 100-year storm's impact on nearby structures.

For that, said Wier, the city would need to install a redundant storm drain system within the C Street drainage basin between 5th Street and Front Street, and the F Street drainage basin between Front Street and 5th Street.

Wier said engineers have modified the project's parameters to meet the minimum goals of the block grant, including improvements to just Front and C streets, bringing the cost down to \$3.8 million.

He said that doing so gives the city the ability to account for a variety of project nuances, to adapt its schedule, and to use subcontractors. "It's a somewhat rare type of project that only a few contractors can do," Wier said.

He added that the storm drain improvements will be the initial step in a re-design of Front Street that was developed by the Planning Commission in 2012. That larger plan calls for narrowing Front Street, installing new pedestrian ramps, creating a stamp sidewalk similar to Beachfront Park, and constructing a curb median to separate pedestrians from vehicle traffic.

That big-picture approach came with an estimated \$20 million price tag which, Wier said, the city tried to get funded last year through a \$15 million Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development grant in cooperation with the Elk Valley Rancheria Tribe.

That initial application was denied. "It could actually take several attempts to get a funding source," Wier said.

"This was a very competitive grant and we were highly encouraged to apply again by the federal evaluators."

He said that with the City Council's approval, the storm drain project now goes out to bid for 30 days. He said he hopes the council awards the contract by the end of January, so construction can begin in April.

The grant's parameters require the project to be completed by June 30, 2021, said Wier.

