

OUR FUTURE FOR JUST RECOVERY

OP-ED



CEER

COALITION FOR ENVIRONMENT,
EQUITY, AND RESILIENCE

Our Local Vision of Just Recovery

Every neighborhood deserves dignity, safety and government preparations and protections from harsh weather.

In the aftermath of severe storms and flooding, we, the residents of the Kings Colony subdivision in Montgomery County formed Unidos por Kings Colony to advocate what our community needs and deserves to thrive and build resilience.

Located in the county's Precinct 4, the families who reside in Kings Colony live without paved roads and adequate drainage infrastructure and face life-threatening challenges like flooding and illegal dumping.

In October 2019, Unidos por Kings Colony invited Montgomery County Commissioner James Metts to tour our neighborhood to witness the challenges we face as a community largely neglected by our representatives and still recovering from damages caused by Hurricane Harvey and Tropical Storm Imelda. We have not heard back from our commissioner's office, and as taxpayers of this community — and hard working residents of Montgomery County — we deserve the dignity of a response.

Commissioner Metts' inaction suggests that he believes this community is not worth protecting and rebuilding. When our county commissioner ignores our requests, it sends the message that this is a community that is slowly deteriorating and gradually being thrown away. Illegal dumping is rampant in Kings Colony. Companies and individuals unlawfully unload construction waste, cars, animal carcasses and other refuse into our ditches, streets, private properties, and wooded areas. Over the last two years, there have been 45 reports of illegal

dumping in Montgomery County's Precinct 4.

Hurricane Harvey and Tropical Storm Imelda intensified the challenges of already inadequate flood infrastructure. Peach Creek floods habitually. On top of that, the water attracts swarms of mosquitoes, worsening safety and health issues. While Montgomery County has scheduled spraying for mosquitoes, underlying drainage issues in Kings Colony



are still unresolved, so mosquitoes persist.

The San Jacinto Regional Watershed Master Drainage Plan, a study to identify potential flood projects in Montgomery County and six other local counties, is underway. Yet, Commissioner Metts has not shown an interest in learning from us what the vulnerabilities are in our community. We know what solutions our community needs because we live with these challenges every day. We will not be made invisible to the county.

The [Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery \(CDBG-DR\)](#) plan, which allocates money for disaster recovery, did not include Kings Colony. The community meetings were poorly advertised and materials were rarely provided in Spanish. We have, however, submitted comments to the county on its CDBG-DR infrastructure plan and to the General Land Office (GLO) on its allocation of hazard mitigation money. Montgomery

County is among seven counties to receive a collective \$212 million for Imelda recovery efforts in areas the Department of Housing and Urban Development identified as “most impacted and distressed.” The funding is here, and we hope our advocacy efforts will pay off this time.

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As part of an effort to support vulnerable communities to mitigate environmental threats, the [Coalition for Environment, Equity, and Resilience \(CEER\)](#) funded a grant for members of its network to expand regional resilience in localities most impacted by disasters and grossly affected by inequity. Unidos por Kings Colony was awarded a \$10,000 grant from [Texas Housers](#), a member organization of CEER, that develops solutions to Texas’ housing and community development problems. Kings Colony residents, with support from Texas Housers, devised a list of feasible projects for which to use the funding.

At a community meeting in January 2020, Unidos por Kings Colony voted to use the Texas Housers grant to certify residents in community emergency response team (CERT) training. When rescuers arrived at our community after Harvey, they refused to enter flooded streets, citing the intensity of the water and pre-existing road conditions as dangers to their safety. Ten feet of rushing water drove families to the roofs of their homes. Members of our community tied themselves to trees and swam to rescue their neighbors. CERT training was voted as the most actionable project because it prepares us to be our own first responders.

We have felt alone in carrying the concerns of yet another hurricane season, on top of having to rebuild our streets and homes, keep our children safe, and fight for what our tax dollars entitle us to. Our neighborhood deserves to have our elected officials serve us. Kings Colony residents need an authentic partnership with local government, which requires the County Commissioner to answer our calls and respond with the public resources meant to address our issues. ■