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For more information, contact:

Steve Valdez, Manager

Public Information

Phone: 272-5314

Cellular Phone: 765-6702

valdezs@hillsboroughcounty.org

Hillsborough County Releases New Preliminary Flood Maps

Hillsborough County officials today announced the release of updated, digital flood hazard maps that show the extent to which areas throughout the county are at risk for flooding. The new flood maps, officially presented to the Board of County Commissioners earlier today, mark the first time in 25 years that a comprehensive re-examination of the county's flood zones has been conducted. Residents and businesses will now have up-to-date, reliable, Internet-accessible information about their flood risk on a property-by-property basis. The revised maps will also allow community planners, engineers, builders and others to make important determinations about where and how new structures and developments should be built.

"Historically, flooding is the most costly natural disaster affecting Hillsborough County," said County Administrator Pat Bean. "The modernization of outdated flood maps represents an important step towards increasing public safety by better equipping our residents to make decisions about protecting themselves and their properties."

The newly released maps are part of a larger effort to modernize the nation's aging flood maps to reflect the most current flood risks and areas of recent growth. In partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and more than two-dozen public and private sector partners, Hillsborough's new flood maps were developed after an extensive, multi-year study of the county's floodplains that used state-of-the-art technologies and risk modeling techniques.

Flood hazard maps, also known as Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs), indicate whether properties are in areas of high, moderate or low flood risk. In reviewing the new county maps, many property owners may find that their risk is higher or lower than they thought. If the risk level for a property changes, so may the requirement to carry flood insurance.

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"The modernization of outdated flood maps addresses a real need," said Bob Gordon, director of the Public Works Department. "Water flow and drainage patterns have changed dramatically in Hillsborough County over the last 25 years and the likelihood of flooding in certain areas of the county has changed as well."

To ensure that all residents and business owners understand the map change process and are aware of their options, a series of educational and outreach activities will be held. Eight public meetings and four local library open houses have been scheduled during the months of November and December so that residents can view the new maps, understand how their properties may be affected and learn more about financial steps that they may need to take to protect their investment. A call center will also be available seven days a week to answer questions and address residents' concerns about the new flood maps at 272-5900.

The new flood maps will also have implications for a range of different industries, professional organizations and associations. Recognizing this, Hillsborough County officials have worked closely with a broad coalition of community partners including builders and developers, realtors and insurers who will be advising and educating their clients and members on the significance of the map changes.

These maps are still preliminary and have not yet been officially adopted. The new digital maps will be posted online on the county's website in November, enabling residents to review the flood designation for their individual properties by simply typing in their address.

Between December 1 and February 28, there will be a Public Comment Period where property owners can submit appeals and protests if they disagree with the maps. Once these comments are received and addressed, the maps are expected to be adopted in the fall of 2006. At that time, the new insurance requirements will take effect.

To learn more about the map modernization project, view the new digital flood maps (beginning in November), and find a schedule of upcoming meetings and library open houses, residents are encouraged to visit www.hillsboroughcounty.org, and click on the "Mapping the Risk: Flood Map Update" link. Individuals with general questions about the local map modernization project can also call the Hillsborough County Citizen Action Center at **272-5900** anytime between 7am-11pm, 7 days a week.

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Prensa: Para información, llamar al 272-5314.