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CORCORAN — The people of Corcoran have spoken — or rather, the state has — and **now property owners will foot the \$10 million bill** for the levee-raising project that protects the city in the event of a flood.

A ballot measure passed Monday with 96 percent of votes in favor. This ballot included a funding proposal to have the two state prisons in Corcoran, agricultural landowners/businesses and residential property owners pick up the tab for the levee work.

The details of the funding plan include the **state being asked to pay \$5.5 million, agricultural property owners to pay \$2.9 million and residential property owners to pay \$1.6 million total over the next three years.**

The Cross Creek Flood Control District **sent out ballots in July** asking property owners to decide on the \$10 million funding plan for the levee-raising project.

Property owners had until Monday at 3 p.m. to cast their votes, at which time a public hearing on the matter took place.

The property owners were able vote “Yes” or “No” on the proposal, with votes being weighed according to the value of the property owned by the person or business casting the vote.

Because the two state prison properties in Corcoran are valued at about \$1 billion — more than half of the \$1.9 billion assessed value for all property in the Corcoran area combined — the funding plan vote **hinged on what the state voted.**

The state voted “Yes” on the ballot, said Bill Sessa, a spokesman for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. He said the **department will have to pay a little over \$1.8 million every year for the next three years.**

Sessa said the department has been helping the Cross Creek Flood District since the beginning of the project to help reduce the risk of flooding. In fact, some of the dirt used for the levee was taken from a state-owned farming operation next to the prisons.

“We recognize that we are part of the district and have a role to play,” Sessa said.

Out of the over **2,800 residential property owners in Corcoran, the average additional amount each owner might pay over the next three years is around \$191 a year.** The rates could be higher or lower, depending on which properties posed the most risk to being flooded.

The flood-protection levee around Corcoran was raised because the Cross Creek Flood Control District board and other district officials, including manager Dustin Fuller, feared severe flooding would occur in the old Tulare Lake bottom.

However, the anticipated flooding never happened.

Because the district didn't have enough money to fund the project, contractors and sub-contractors were paid with registered warrants, which are basically IOUs.

The bill will be tacked onto property tax bills, which are normally paid twice a year in separate payments. The first set of property tax funds will not come until December, Fuller said, with the second round coming in April 2018.

Fuller admits that it has been a long process, and it will continue to be a long process as he still has a lot of financing to secure.

Fuller said repayment of debt is first and foremost on his list of things to do. Some of the biggest contractors who did work on the levee were paid, but many smaller contractors and sub-contractors are still owed.

The district will only be getting about \$3.3 million a year over the next three years, so Fuller hopes to seek a bank loan for the full amount to pay off the IOUs. He said the passed proposal will hopefully be used as collateral to secure the loan.

Besides repaying contractors and investors, Fuller said there is some leveling work needed at the prison property and some minor touch-up work still needed on the levee to ensure its effectiveness for the future.

“We’re here to protect people and their property,” Fuller said. “That’s what we intend to do.”

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