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ACTA *Newsletter*

Director of Watershed Protection Department, Victoria Li, Draws Out Plans to Rebuild the City's Infrastructure

Austin, TX — Victoria Li, Director of Watershed Protection Department of the City of Austin, delineates a comprehensive plan that her department hopes to implement in the next 40 years in order to eradicate the flash flooding problem which often plagues the city during torrential downpours.

In an exclusive interview with the Asian Contractor Association, Li mapped out her department's ambition to tackle the flooding issue beginning from revamping the city's infrastructure.

Li explained, infrastructure such as roads, transportation, utilities, waste water treatment, and storm water drainage, are all part of the infrastructure of the city.

Watershed Protection Department is in charge of the drainage system and storm water management construction projects for drainage, and the main function of the work is to prevent flooding, the director continued.

"When many cities around the country were built over a century ago, there was not a lot of understanding of what a drainage system looked like," she said, "and therefore infrastructure in drainage system in those cities was mostly lacking. Even though the city of Austin has built some infrastructure in our drainage system since the 70s, the work was minimal."

Li pointed out that in and around the Austin area, there are approximately 8,000 points identified as possible flooding areas. The Watershed Protection Department has designed a master plan with priorities to improve the most prone areas to flooding.

Based on this plan, Li said, the department estimated the budget it needs each year to devote to these infrastructure projects to be around \$30 million, and it will take approximately 40 years to complete all the projects in the master plan.

"We also budgeted funding to upgrade and maintain existing systems. We are expecting our budget to increase as well to keep up with the maintenance efforts," said Li.

The director also talked about special infrastructure projects currently underway such as the Walnut Creek Tunnel in the downtown area.

The Tunnel is about 60 – 80 feet underground to handle approximately 130 acres of water flowing down-



stream. This project will significantly reduce the damages to the downtown area during flooding season, according to the director.

Over 100 structures in the downtown area will be out of the flood plan completely after the tunnel is built. Many empty lots will also be allowed to be developed into commercial properties and thus bring in more tax revenue for the city, Li commented.

This is a project that has attracted a lot of attention. Parks and trails will also be built above the tunnel to provide citizens and tourists alike a safe place to relax, exercise and enjoy the outdoors. A total of 77 \$million has been budgeted for this project expected to begin next year, disclosed the director.

Li was born and raised in Taiwan and has a MS in Civil Engineering, Environmental, from UT, Austin. She has also served as the Executive Director of the Texas Board of Professional Engineers from 2000 to 2004.

Asian Contractors Corner

Raymond Chan has found life in America a fruitful and gratifying one since he moved to Austin 35 years ago. Not only did he find a wonderful life partner, his wife Grace, he also found a successful business now with an annual sales volume exceeding two million dollars.

As young as 19 years old, Raymond left his home in Hong Kong and traveled across seas to enroll in the University of TX, Austin. Little did he know when he first set foot in Austin in 1972 that it would be the place where he would get married, raise a family, and start an engineering consulting company.

His journey to success in the US has been marked by dedication, hard work, and many steps in the right direction. Raymond found employment immediately after graduation from UT with the largest civil engineering and environmental consultant company in Austin at the time, Espey, Huston & Associates (EHA). Because of his work ethic, attitude, and engineering knowledge, EHA decided to sponsor his application for a permanent resident visa for him to stay in the U.S.

After ten years of service at EHA, Raymond moved on to work for then the second largest civil engineering consulting firm in Austin, Carlson & Dippel (C&D). At C&D, Raymond acquired knowledge in project management and office administration, which later proved to be very useful in managing his own company. Four years later in 1989, Raymond launched his own endeavor named Raymond Chan & Associates, Inc. (RC&A), a civil engineering consulting firm.



To some, 1989 was perhaps not the best year to start a business. The country was in the middle of a recession due to the Savings & Loans institution failures, similar to the massive bank failures in 2009. Many civil engineering consulting firms were cutting back under the distressed economic environment.

But to Raymond, it was a unique opportunity for him. The City of Austin had just passed favorable ordinances to encourage participation of Minority/Women-owned Business Enterprises in City construction projects. Raymond's service as a minority subcontractor to larger firms would not only help keep their cost down, but also help them meet the City's M/WBE participation goals.

The strategy worked. Following a few years of diligent work with prime contractors, the City began to award prime contracts to RC&A. Raymond's consistent quality work and the trust and relationship that have been built between the City and RC&A have paid off. RC&A has collaborated with the City on numerous major Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects, including the Austin-Travis County 911 Center at the old Robert Mueller Municipal Airport, several major drainage facilities at the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, the George Washington Carver Library & Museum, the Crystalbrook Flood Control Project, a regional water quality pond at West Bouldin Creek, the South Austin Police Substation, and the erosion assessment for over 20 watersheds.

Raymond grew the company from an annual sales of \$70,000 in 1989 to approximately \$2.3 million in 2009. Over the last 30 years, RC&A has been able to survive several economic downward turns. The unyielding strength of the company is contributed to the owner's conservative business philosophy. Raymond believes in investing in his employees by fostering individual growth through training and mentoring. He thinks an "assembly line" type of production, as profitable as it may be, hinders the professional growth of individuals. Today RC&A is 100% debt free and 100% owned.

In the last 20 years, RC&A has completed over 500 City projects, either as a prime consultant or as a subconsultant. The entrepreneur summed up the keys to his success as being: a) responsive; b) sensitive to the neighborhood and stakeholders' concerns; c) able to meet the City's project timeline and budget requirements; d) frugal of the public dollars so that more can be accomplished; e) mindful of the project impact, particularly on the environment and the natural resources of the City and e) always thorough and complete in producing construction documents.

His advice to new comers who are interested in doing business with the City of Austin is patience. He recommends starting out as a sub-consultant to prime consultants and allowing time for the City staff to know your capabilities and the quality of your work through projects large or small, then the chance of being selected as a prime consultant will be greater. He said it took his company approximately three years to obtain the first prime contract from the City.

Raymond also said that in the case that your proposal is not selected by the City, it is always a good idea to obtain a "debriefing" from the City, so you can improve on future proposals.

On a personal note, Raymond has been active in the Asian community and the community at large for over 15 years. For the Asian community, he is one of the founders of the Network of Asian American Organizations (NAAO) and served as the first president of the NAAO. Besides NAAO, he has also served as a board member for the Texas Asian Chamber of Commerce and the Asian American Resource Center. For the community at large, he has served on the City's Charter Revision Commission. Raymond has also volunteered his time and served as a panelist on many public forums for small business owners and engineers. Currently, he is serving on the Mayor's Community Cabinet.

Raymond feels very fortunate to have his lovely wife Grace working side by side with him and assists him in all financial and administrative matters. He has three grown children Jonathan, Stephen and Britney. In his past time, Raymond loves to spend time with his family and friends, plays golf, and travels around the Country and the World. (Contents provided by RC&A)



EVERYONE HAS A STORY TO TELL. We have created this corner to highlight members of the Asian Contractor Association. If you are interested in having a corner of your own in one of our issues, please contact Aletta by email at acta@cs.com.

City of Austin Officials Provide Latest on City Projects and Rule Changes

Austin, TX— The City of Austin invited four of its service providers for a second time this year to provide updates on the City's latest small and minority programs and project opportunities. The service providers are Asian Contractor Association, Austin Black Contractor's Association, Community Mentor Protégé Initiative, and US Hispanic Contractors Association.

Officials from six departments descended at City Hall on September 16th to present important project opportunities and rule changes regarding the good faith efforts mandated by the city to prime contractors to provide fair contracting opportunities for minority subcontractors.

The new rule requires prime contractors utilize "at least two reasonable, available, and verifiable means" to solicit bids from minority subcontractors. It also states unequivocally that "bid shopping is prohibited," and instructs that "publishing notice in a local publication such as newspaper, trade association publication, or via electronic/social media" are plausible ways to advertise the solicitations by prime contractors, according to the Department of Small and Minority Business Resources.

On the construction side, the bidding process for the new Austin Energy System Control Center is well underway, reported the Public Works Department. DPR Construction is the manager at risk, who has hired one of the Asian subcontractors, Raymond Chan & Associate, as the civil engineer for the 50 million dollar project.

Neighborhood Housing and Community Development announced a new project to turn a historical house built in the 1880s into the African-American Cultural and Heritage Facility, due to be completed early next year.

Contract and Land Management Department highlighted progress and developmental stages of the Waller Creek Tunnel Project, currently in the designing phases. The department also listed future professional service opportunities including: environmental transportation, field engineering & pedestrian rotation list, structural engineering rotation list 2010-2012, civil engineering rotation list. The CLMD Rotation List Management group currently manages 64 active rotation list.

Parks and Recreation Department reported ongoing work to improve downtown parks, focusing on converting existing wading pools to surface water-play with filtration and disinfection. Public opinion has favored splashpads, safer and popular among young visitors at the parks in recent years, according to the department.

Also announced by the department was the repair project of Liz Carpenter Foundation located in the Butler Park scheduled to begin construction next January.

Purchasing Department under the Green Initiatives reported efforts to put forth a plan to help businesses obtain green certification.

Lastly, SMBR Director Veronica Lara introduced her department's latest additions, Assistant Director Deborah Dibble and Financial Bonding Consultant Luke Ortega Luper. To receive a free consultation from Mr. Luper, please contact him at 512-974-7645.

Copies of reports from all departments from the update session can be obtained at the SMBR Plan Room, located at 4201 Ed Bluestein Blvd, Austin, TX 78721. Tel: 512-974-7799

