

Richwood residents eye flood lawsuit

By **STEPHANY GARZA**

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RICHWOOD — About 150 residents gathered in a church directly behind Richwood City Hall to start the process of possible litigation Wednesday evening over flooding in the city, but it remains unclear who they plan to sue.

"I've had attorneys tell me it's not whether they'll take the case — it's whether we want them. That's how serious they think this is," organizer

"I think as residents of the City of Richwood, we need to hold people accountable for what has happened here."

— Kevin McKinney, advisory group chairman

Group

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Tony Krause said during Wednesday's inaugural meeting.

After Hurricane Harvey pummeled the Gulf Coast, Richwood residents seemed to be unscathed until a few days after the storm. Krause believes homes in Richwood flooded as a result of the actions of other cities and businesses, such as Lake Jackson and Phillips 66, both of which used sandbags and pumps to divert water, Krause said.

Residents met under a newly formed group called Richwood Advisory Council. In their first order of business, a majority of residents elected Kevin McKinney to be the organization's chairman.

McKinney's home on Sherwood Drive received about 3 feet of water. He didn't have flood insurance because his home wasn't within the floodplain, he said.

"We all have to work together as a team. I don't want this to happen to us ever again, and I think you all agree with me,"

McKinney said. "I think as residents of the City of Richwood, we need to hold people accountable for what has happened here."

While the group and its plans to litigate are still in their infancy, McKinney said the most important aspect to work on is for the group to collect factual information for the case.

"We need to get the facts, and if the facts show these people were involved in what happened here, then I think we need to hold them accountable," he said. "We also want to know what the City of Richwood is going to do about it."

Angleton attorney Mark Jones attended the meeting to answer residents' legal questions. He will be co-counsel alongside Houston lawyer Matias J. Adroque.

While a majority of the

group voted in favor of a class-action lawsuit, the litigator said they're still evaluating the best way to handle the case.

"We have been retained to investigate claims against several entities for the flooding practices that have harmed the residents of Richwood," Adroque said in an email Thursday afternoon. "At this time, we will not reveal who the potential defendants will be. Additionally, a decision has not been made whether the claim will be a class action for all the residents or individual claims."

Krause assured residents the case wouldn't cost them a penny. The legal team would be backing the case themselves, he said.

There's one specific question Krause has regarding the City of Lake Jackson pumping near Old Angleton Road and FM

2004.

"We need to know if they even tried to stop the pumping," Krause said. "And if they didn't, why not? Why sacrifice this for that?"

The meeting initially was set to be at First Baptist Church in Richwood, but later changed because the church wanted to keep a neutral stance on the matter, according to the congregation's Facebook page. The meeting instead took place at Iglesia el Pueblo de Dios on Cedar Street, which is directly behind City Hall.

Organizers plan to have another meeting in the next few weeks, but details have not been set, McKinney said Thursday afternoon.

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