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Virginia Street Bridge scheduled to close summer for flood plain widening

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Willow Glen motorists accustomed to using the Virginia Street Bridge will have to find an alternate route for much of 2009. The bridge is scheduled to be closed for about nine months starting this summer while the Santa Clara Valley Water District widens the flood plain along the Guadalupe River as part of the Upper Guadalupe River Flood Protection Project.

Work will include widening the flood plain on the east bank of the river from Interstate 280 to the Union Pacific Railroad bridge crossing, and expanding the Virginia Street Bridge 50 feet, where it will connect to Harliss Avenue. The entire flood plain project extends 5.7 miles along the river from Interstate 280 to Blossom Hill Road. This area of work is being done in the most northerly portion of the project.

When complete, the bridge will have viewing alcoves where the old and new sections meet. Sidewalks, historical acorn lighting, concrete walls with decorative panel art and tube steel rail in the alcoves are also part of the plan. There will be a trailhead for the future extension of the Guadalupe River Trail between Highway 87 and the river.

"I think the current design reflects the neighborhood," said Debbie Wade, a resident of the Gardner neighborhood.

If all elements remain on schedule, construction will begin in the summer, with bridge completion set for March 2010 and the flood plain completion set for November 2011, said Todd Inman, Santa Clara Valley Water District project engineer, at a community meeting held in December.

According to the water district, the project is designed to protect 7,500 homes and businesses from a 100-year flood that could cause an estimated minimum of \$330 million in damages. In 1995, the Guadalupe River flooded its banks, causing damage to more than 150 homes in Willow Glen and South San Jose.

After the project, if the river overflows, Inman said the floodwaters are expected to fill the new flood plain area and re-enter the river a half-mile downstream. The flood plain is designed only to carry overflow and will remain dry most of the year, Inman added.

The project is a collaborative effort among the water district, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the city of San Jose.

Once the bridge is complete, the city will be responsible for maintenance, but the water district will continue to maintain the flood plain.

The 15-year project plan is funded by the Clean, Safe Creeks and Natural Flood Protection parcel tax passed countywide in November 2000.

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