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City needs \$500K to fix problems at Watergarden

Bond funding is one of many possible sources

BY JAIME POWELL
Callier-Times

The city of Corpus Christi likely will look at multiple funding sources to come up with the \$500,000 needed to solve the electrical and plumbing woes that sucked the Watergarden dry.

The 20-year-old centerpiece of the city's arts district has been empty for more than a month, after heavy summer rainfall flooded its pump room, causing major mechanical and electrical problems and playing havoc with 18 weddings planned for the facility.

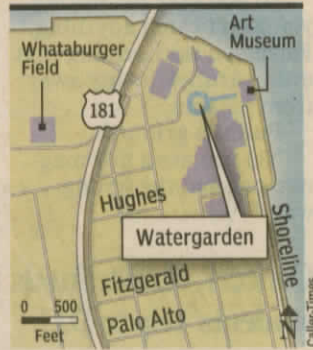
"What we are looking at is finding some options to repair the Watergarden and place it back in operation," said Assistant City Manager Oscar Martinez. "There is major repair work that has to be done. In the structure itself, there are some pipes and some infrastructure underneath the Watergarden that is deteriorating. We need to decide how we can repair it, to preserve and promote the life of the Watergarden."

The city's engineering department has recommended a mixture of repairing what can be fixed and replacing what can't.

"The pumps are probably going to require replacement," Martinez said. "The pump engines are damaged beyond help — particularly the inner workings. It's a combination of both."

The city's annual Watergarden maintenance budget is \$143,671, which includes one full-time employee, now working elsewhere in the city parks department. Most of that money goes to electrical costs and routine repairs and maintenance, such as cleaning, Martinez said.

The city is figuring out where to come up with an additional \$500,000. Part of it could come from



eligible capital improvement or bond funding. Some of the repair costs also could come from hotel occupancy taxes and the city's facility maintenance reserve fund, which is about \$400,000, Martinez said.

Once the funding has been earmarked, city staff will make a recommendation to the City Council. Because the money is not in this year's budget, Martinez said, the repairs will require council action.

Kristen Hall Price had booked her dream wedding for Oct. 17 at the Watergarden a year and a half in advance. The invitations had been sent when the first signs of trouble came from the city.

"They called me and said, 'Oh, by the way, the water is not going to be running. Would you like to move your event to a different day?' I started working with that, and then I got a call nine days out from my wedding saying they were having electrical issues and it was not guaranteed that we would have lighting and what did I want to do," she said.

She ended up marrying her longtime sweetheart, Garon Price, at the Solomon P. Ortiz International Center, but she still is concerned with what is happening with her first choice, the Watergarden.

"It's outdoors, and it was a beautiful place that represented the city. I definitely hope they fix it."

The Watergarden was designed by New York landscape architect Robert Zion.

Please see **WATERGARDEN 3B**

CVF - Bayfront Plaza - (Watergarden)

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WATERGARDEN *from 1B*

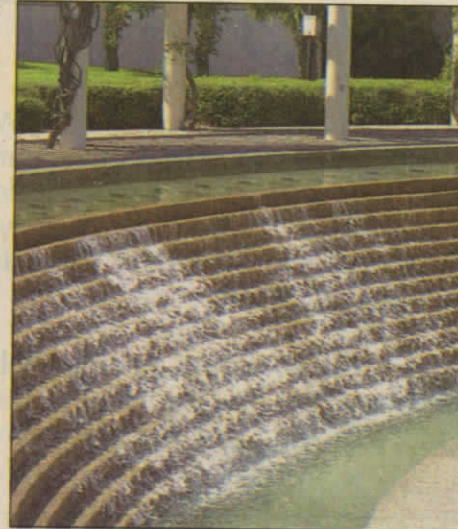
The \$2.38 million price tag was split between the city and the private Foundation for Sciences and Arts Inc. The city's share came from a hotel-occupancy tax increase.

The only other time the Watergarden was shut down was in May 1996 when the city drought management plan reached Condition 2 because lake reservoirs receded to 30 percent.

Martinez said it will be fixed. He is just unsure of where the half a million dollars will come from and how quickly the city can come up with it.

"I don't think that not having the Watergarden function is an option," he said. "Since we are in the mode of trying to find the funding, it is premature to predict when we would have it working again."

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