

City of Austin claims the Waller Tunnel is flawed

More Waller Tunnel fiasco



By Rudy Koski, FOX 7 Austin (mailto:rudy.koski@foxtv.com?)

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For the past several years one of the few ways to get a clear view of the Waller Creek Tunnel Project was from the top of a parking garage. Now, a letter from attorneys from the City of Austin is providing a different perspective. "It's a huge concern," said Austin mayor Steve Adler.

The Mayor and Austin City Council members don't like what they've read.

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The idea behind project dates back more than 20 years. A plan was needed to help promote downtown development along Waller Creek, which is in a floodplain.

Voters approved about \$20 million to divert storm water down into a mile-long tunnel under Waller Creek. It starts at Waterloo Park and dumps out into Lady Bird Lake.

SJ Louis Construction was hired 7 years ago to dig the tunnel for almost \$50-million.

The price tag, for the overall project, has increased to more than \$160 million.

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"This project has been snake bit from the very beginning, with the design of the Intake House being too tall, violating the line of sight rule with the State Capitol back there. But the problem pales in comparison with the claims now being made by the city regarding the tunnel."

The default letter by the city demands a repayment by the amount of \$22 million.

The city claims that: "SJL constructed a tunnel with significant missing rebar, numerous surface imperfections, and a patchwork repairs."



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A review by an engineering firm hired by the city concluded the tunnel's capacity to control the flow of water is reduced by almost 70% and that has reduced its primary purpose of flood control. (weather) 81

It was also determined that the: "Tunnel has lost the structural integrity and the intended service life that the designed tunnel would have provided." The attorneys went on to say, " The City ... is forced to accept a tunnel with a diminished value."

The default letter, which was sent February 23rd, states the city started documenting problems with the tunnel started to back in 2013. "I didn't get a lot of notice for this as well ... I am pretty concerned about, as the whole council is, yes," said Mayor Adler.

He went on to say he doubts anyone in the city will lose their job over this issue. "I think at this point we need to find out, first, find out what's going on, and then we need to figure out what is that happened here," said Adler.

It's not known how the reduction in flood control will impact future development plans downtown. According to an official statement from the city, the tunnel is currently operating as a critical piece of flood protection infrastructure.

Attorneys for SJ Louis construction filed a lawsuit- requesting a temporary restraining order and Declaratory Judgment. It's claimed the city has already accepted the tunnel project as completed and should not be able to classify the contract as terminated. Doing that, the company argues, could prevent them from getting hired for other government contracts.

A hearing date on the request has not been set.

