



Buyouts Bring Relief to a Pennsylvania Community

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Lower Moreland Township, PA – Chestnut Street homes located near Pennypack Creek, dating to the early 1900s, and the nearby Garden Condos built in the 1960s shared a history of significant flooding.



Severe flooding in September 1999 devastated the community, leaving residents displaced for two years while repairs were made. “Then, just after finally moving back in, Tropical Storm Allison flooded [residents] again in 2001,” said Lower Moreland Township Manager, Alison Rudolf.

Southeastern Pennsylvania received eight to ten inches of rain from Allison. Residents were weary and concerned about their future. Then a search for a permanent solution to the repetitive flooding began.

Township officials decided that residents could not continue to live in the floodplain. They contacted the Commonwealth and completed an application to participate in FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). Following a major disaster declaration, the HMGP funds up to 75 percent of the eligible costs of a project that will reduce or eliminate damages from future natural hazard events.

A buyout is a voluntary partnership between willing homeowners and local communities with the goal of permanently removing people and structures from the floodplain. “Property acquisition, or buyouts, is the only flood loss prevention activity that is 100% effective, 100% of the time, and it lasts forever. Additionally, buyouts are environmentally friendly because they result in returning the floodplain to its natural function,” explained State Hazard Mitigation Officer, Ron Killins.

Thanks to the HMGP grant, township officials were able to offer Chestnut Street homeowners fair market value for their properties; most of the homeowners accepted the offer.

The Chestnut Street acquisition project was completed under budget. The Township then requested and received additional funds to include the Garden Condos in the buyout. The project was successfully completed in 2005, at a cost totaling \$2,636,060. A total of 35 structures were acquired in the project.

After the buyout and demolition, a new water retention area was built where the residences once stood. “It held an unbelievable amount of water”, Ms. Rudolf said. “This project saved our senior facility, shopping center, businesses, and homes. Everyone was dry! All of these would have been under water [during another major flood event]. This project made all the difference for our community.”

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region III**

State: **Pennsylvania**

County: **Montgomery County**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**
Hazard Type: **Flooding**
Activity/Project Type: **Acquisition/Buyouts**
Structure Type: **Wood Frame**
Activity/Project Start Date: **03/2002**
Activity/Project End Date: **08/2005**
Funding Source: **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**
Funding Recipient: **Local Government**
Funding Recipient Name: **Lower Moreland Township**
Application/Project Number: **9999**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **\$2,636,060.00 (Actual)**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **Yes**
Federal Disaster #: **1294 , 09/18/1999**
Federal Disaster Year: **1999**
Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**
Tested By Federal Disaster #: **No Federal Disaster specified**
Year First Tested: **2006**
Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: <http://www.fema.gov/government/grant/hmgp/index.shtm>
Reference URL 2: <http://www.pema.state.pa.us/>

Main Points

- Township officials decided that residents could not continue to live in the floodplain and contacted the Commonwealth and completed an application to participate in FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP).
- Thanks to the HMGP grant, township officials were able to offer Chestnut Street homeowners fair market value for their properties; most of the homeowners accepted the offer.
- The project was successfully completed in 2005, at a cost totaling \$2,636,060. A total of 35 structures were acquired in the project.
- After the buyout and demolition, a new water retention area was built where the residences once stood.



Township Manager, Alison Rudolph