



The Power of Collaboration

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

DeKalb County, Illinois



Kirkland, IL - Les Bellah, former Mayor of Kirkland, Illinois, knows the power of water. According to Bellah, in July 1996, a storm dumped eighteen inches of rain on his town in less than twelve hours. The Kishwaukee River jumped its banks and flooded the Congress Lake Estates Trailer Park. Water came up to the windows of many trailers and left a two-foot-high watermark on Kirkland’s Village Office.

“You don’t realize the power of water until you see it first-hand,” said Bellah. “It’s a hopeless feeling, you just sit and watch and go ‘wow’.”

The 1996 storm ultimately destroyed the Congress Lake Estates Trailer Park and left masses of debris in its wake. But despite this damage, the flood did not destroy the small, tight-knit community of Kirkland. Local volunteers worked hard for several days clearing debris, cleaning infrastructure, cooking for volunteers and those in need, and finding housing solutions for displaced residents.

After the waters receded and the debris was all hauled away, the Village faced a serious question: what to do now with the devastated Congress Lake Estates Trailer Park? Local leadership prudently chose to go down the path of mitigation.

Within months of the flood event, Kirkland leaders collaborated with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the State of Illinois on a hazard mitigation acquisition project aimed at buying out the mobile homes at the Congress Lake Estates Trailer Park.

Once the trailers were all purchased at pre-flood market value, Kirkland residents decided to create a natural park where the trailer park once stood, thereby both beautifying the area and preventing the location from future flood damage.

The former site of the Congress Lake Estates Trailer Park has now been transformed into Pioneer Park, a large green space by the scenic Kishwaukee River where visitors can find a lake stocked for fishing, an 18-hole Frisbee golf course, a concrete skateboarding course, and plenty of picnic tables and benches for relaxing.

“We are very proud of our park,” said Bellah. “With this last flood of August 2007, we proved one more time that we made the right decision. The area flooded again, and it would have affected homes if they were still here. So the project really paid off.”

FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) covered 75 percent of the \$1.6 million price tag for this acquisition project, while local homeowners provided 23.25 percent, and the county provided 1.75 percent. The federal hazard mitigation grant funding was administered by the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA).

According to Bellah, Kirkland residents were ecstatic about the results of this project. “We are sad for all the people who lost their homes during the flood of 1996,” he said. “But through foresight and some good decisions, we were able to turn the whole experience into a positive thing.”

Activity/Project Location

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

FEMA Region: **Region V**

State: **Illinois**

County: **DeKalb County**

City/Community: **Kirkland**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public/Private Partnership**
Hazard Type: **Flooding**
Activity/Project Type: **Acquisition/Buyouts**
Structure Type: **Manufactured Housing**
Activity/Project Start Date: **08/1996**
Activity/Project End Date: **05/2000**
Funding Source: **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**
Application/Project Number: **1129.007**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **\$1,600,000.00 (Estimated)**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **Yes**
Federal Disaster #: **1129 , 07/25/1996**
Federal Disaster Year: **1996**
Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**
Tested By Federal Disaster #: **1729 , 09/25/2007**
Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: **<http://www.floodsmart.gov>**
Reference URL 2: **<http://www.state.il.us/iema/>**

Main Points

- In July 1996, a storm dumped eighteen inches of rain on Kirkland, IL in less than twelve hours, which flooded the Congress Lake Estates Trailer Park.
- The storm's afterpath left the Trailer Park destroyed and masses of debris.
- Within months of the flood event, Kirkland leaders collaborated with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the State of Illinois on a hazard mitigation acquisition project aimed at buying out the mobile homes at the Congress Lake Estates Trailer Park.
- Once the trailers were all purchased at pre-flood market value, Kirkland residents decided to create a natural park where the trailer park once stood, thereby both beautifying the area and preventing the location from future flood damage.
- The former site of the Congress Lake Estates Trailer Park has now been transformed into Pioneer Park, and when the area flooded again in August 2007, only the park was affected.



The Kishwaukee River.



A picture of Pioneer Park.