

# FEMA Awards Nearly \$1.5 Million for Flood Control Projects in Barceloneta, Patillas and Villalba

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**Guaynabo, Puerto Rico** – The communities of Barceloneta, Patillas and Villalba have been vulnerable to excessive flooding in recent years as climate change has increased the risk of flooding, while antiquated water control systems offer little protection against torrential rains.

To help these municipalities build more efficient flood control infrastructure, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) allocated nearly \$1.5 million through its Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). These funds will fully fund the cost of the initial phase, which consists of geotechnical studies and engineering designs required prior to construction.

Construction projects will incorporate nature-based solutions to repair vulnerable water drainage systems. This construction approach includes bioengineering and other low-impact development solutions, which are incorporated into the project design to deliver a wide range of economic, ecological and social benefits.

"These projects will create a lasting impact on these communities and will be a model for others to follow. By using environmentally focused engineering designs we are in tune with the times, addressing the challenge of climate change while helping to build resilient communities," said the Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator José G. Baquero.

In Barceloneta, torrential rain periods can disrupt the daily lives of citizens, to the point that cranes must be used to rescue drivers from flooded streets, and that residents are unable to enter and leave their homes due to runoff, explained Yadira Rodríguez Cruz, director of Barceloneta's Office of Emergency Management.



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To lessen the impact of excessive flooding in its communities, the municipality of Barceloneta received nearly \$579,000 for the initial phase of its flood control project. Mitigation repairs include the installation of 3,700 feet of reinforced concrete pipeline parallel to the existing pipeline in downtown Barceloneta. Total repairs are estimated at nearly \$1.9 million.

"Improving the stormwater sewer system is critical because it manages the proper control and flow of stormwater runoff separately from wastewater," Rodríguez said. "This will prevent urban flooding and that drivers and residents face emergency situations due to flooded streets."

Meanwhile, in the community of La Vega in Villalba, residents still harbor fears of flooding in their homes, said Nancy Martínez Marcial. "The uncertainty that every time it starts to rain we don't know if the street is going to flood. We are worried that at some point the water could get into the houses," she said.

FEMA allocated \$213,000 for the initial phase of the project to design and build surface and subsurface drainage infrastructure and streambank stabilization along the banks of the Jacaguas River in the community of La Vega. The construction of this project is estimated at nearly \$1.6 million.

In addition, FEMA approved about \$702,000 to begin a mitigation project in the Recio sector, a small community in the town of Guardaraya, Patillas. This project will reduce flood risks and provide safe access to about 250 families. Construction is estimated at over \$6.2 million and consists of the expansion of an open concrete channel that collects and discharges runoff water from the community into a nearby river.

In response to this announcement, the executive director of the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency (COR3), Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, said, "The development of this type of project, which integrates nature-based solutions, is even more important given the need in Puerto Rico to address the damages caused by sea level rise and flooding, among other situations. I urge the municipalities of Patillas, Villalba and Barceloneta to request the first advance of the 25 percent available through the Working Capital Advance pilot program to promote the development of these mitigation works that provide security to communities and minimize the impact of climate change."



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To date, FEMA has awarded over \$18.1 million for 28 projects from the HMGP program to decrease flood risks.

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