



# FEMA

## *Two Birds, One Stone Village of Aberdeen, Ohio*

**Aberdeen, OH** - Ohio River flooding is nothing new to the village of Aberdeen and its population of 545. Before March 1997, the historic riverfront community about 50 miles east of Cincinnati had lived through five major 20th century flood events (1913, '36, '37, '59 and '96).

While past efforts had been made to reduce the community's exposure to repetitive damage, including adoption of a local floodplain ordinance in 1983, Aberdeen had an obvious "Achilles heel" in terms of repeated property damage, danger to residents and public safety forces and negative impact on the community's appearance and quality of life.

That vulnerable spot was a stretch of downtown river frontage roughly 10 blocks long by three blocks deep which slopes dramatically down from the village's main street (U.S. Route 52) toward the Ohio River. For the last 100-150 yards before the river bank, the hillside flattens into a level plain 8-10 feet below the Base Flood Elevation (100-year flood level). As a practical matter, during periods of heavy rain or when the river begins to escape its banks, this low-lying area functions as a natural drainage basin which can fill very rapidly with several feet of water.

According to current Aberdeen Mayor Billie Eitel, who took office in 2000, local safety forces and volunteers had been called out on numerous occasions prior to 1997 to rescue residents of this area from rising water and tow mobile homes to safer ground.

Because of the unprecedented speed with which runoff accumulated in March 1997, only a handful of mobile homes could be removed from the riverfront area before it became impassable. Virtually all of the three dozen housing units in the low-lying area were destroyed or significantly damaged by rampaging floodwaters as the Ohio surged out of its banks during the next several days.

During FEMA-assisted local recovery efforts, village officials were put in contact with the OEMA Mitigation Branch and briefed on the availability of federal hazard mitigation grants. In discussing the possibilities with area residents and developing a local HMGP proposal, it became clear to community leaders that they had a unique opportunity to "kill two birds with one stone" through a property acquisition project that would: a) eliminate most structures from the riverfront area and b) convert the village's "front yard" along a scenic stretch of the Ohio from an unsightly jumble of substandard housing into a ¾ mile long riverfront park.

While state and federal officials approved Aberdeen's grant proposal in early 1998, the village and its leaders encountered delays and difficulties in implementing the buyout project.

While a few isolated homes still remain in the mitigated area, by early 2002 Mayor Eitel proudly pointed out a new volunteer-constructed (and flood resistant) gazebo that serves as a bandstand for free summer concerts; a string of new merchant-donated riverbank park benches and a grassy expanse of new public parkland that stretches from the eastern edge of the business district to a pre-existing municipal boat dock and children's playground several blocks away.



**Brown County,  
Ohio**



### **Quick Facts**

Sector:

**Public/Private Partnership**

Cost:

**Amount Not Available**

Primary Activity/Project:

**Acquisition/Buyouts**

Primary Funding:

**Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**