



FEMA

Acquisition in Cambridge Residents Like "View From the Top"

Cambridge, OH - "It was a bad situation turned good," said Ron LePage, a buyout participant, in Cambridge, OH. Cambridge, with a population of 13,000, sits at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in Guernsey County. Homes are nestled in the rolling terrain, a dream for those at the peak, but the runoff from heavy rainfall plagues homes at the lower elevations. The acquisition project primarily focused on 60-65 homes suffering from decades of loss due to repetitive flooding. In the past decade Guernsey County has endured three Presidential Declared Disasters. The most severe flooding in recorded history occurred five years ago. Relentless storms pounded the area on June 27, 1998 with the floodwaters cresting on June 30th. The waters didn't recede to below flood stage until July 4th.

In its wake, the flood left more than 100 residents with extensive damage to their homes. "It was devastating," said Michael Coulter, who had two inches of water in the top level of his tri-level home. The lower levels were completely immersed. "I don't know what we would have done without FEMA."

The stress associated with the flood recovery and the fear of impending storms were the deciding factors for many homeowners who elected to participate in the buyout. Ron LePage and Peter Blazvick lived in the low-lying neighborhood, which had the largest number (26) of acquired and (4) retrofitted properties. The source of the flooding was Gordon's Run, a creek near their homes.

The Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), activated in a Presidential Disaster Declaration, is designed to relieve communities of future flood losses and give homeowners of flooded properties options. The community of Cambridge chose to apply for these funds and use them for an acquisition/retrofitting project. Participation in the buyout process is voluntary, but homeowners are required to go through a cost benefit analysis to justify their involvement in the project. These funds would be used to purchase the properties and demolish the structures. Then, the property would be left in perpetuity to the community as open space, never to be built upon again. Other homeowners took the option of retrofitting the flooded portions of their home to minimize future damage.

In 1998, City Engineer Jeanette Wierzbicki received notice from the State that mitigation funding was available through the HMGP to purchase homes that sustained repetitive flood damage. She was the initial driving force behind the effort.

On January 3, 2004, severe storms poured five inches of water in 72 hours over large portions of the State. Temperatures plummeted to below zero, warmed and again returned to dangerously cold. Guernsey County was one of the 14 designated counties included in the Presidential Declaration resulting from this severe storm and rain event. The mitigation efforts begun in 1998 proved successful. Several of the acquired properties (now empty lots) had standing water from the rain.

Coulter, Blazvick and LePage expressed concern for those who remain in their former neighborhoods. These three homeowners, pleased with their participation in the project, have relocated in Cambridge to homes on higher ground.



Guernsey County,
Ohio



Quick Facts

Sector:

Private

Cost:

Amount Not Available

Primary Activity/Project:

Acquisition/Buyouts

Primary Funding:

Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)