



# FEMA

## Minnesota City Battles Flooding Residents Retreat from Cedar River

**Austin, MN** - In the spring of 2000, floodwaters in Austin, Minnesota, crested at 23.4 feet, the highest on record. But far fewer homes received flood damage than in the multiple flood events of the last 30 years. A first-of-its-kind acquisition program was conducted after two major floods in 1978. With additional buyouts occurring after succeeding floods, a total of 163 structures were eventually removed from the flood plain - before the flood of 2000.

In our history of settling this vast continent of North America, rivers continually provided a stopping-off point. The Cedar River meanders across the flat lands of the Minnesota prairie and is joined by Turtle Creek and Dobbins Creek where the City of Austin now lies. Austin grew up around the river, as businesses and neighborhoods developed and people harnessed the river's flow to power the flour and saw mills.

After the second devastating flood hit within 10 days in July 1978, residents and City officials in Austin knew something had to be done.

Concerned citizens formed the Floodway Action Citizens Task Source (FACTS) to investigate ways to solve the flooding problem. The group, with a membership that reached 450, met and dialogued with the Austin City Council, Turtle Creek Watershed Board, the Department of Natural Resources, the Governor's office and state and local agencies to gather as much information as possible.

The City of Austin looked to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop a solution for the problem of repetitive flooding. The USACE studied the possibilities of dredging the Cedar River or engineering a structural flood control project, but concluded that the various structural and non-structural solutions were not cost effective.

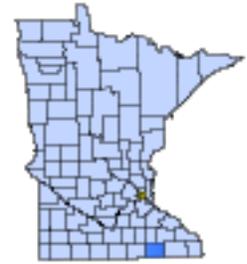
Residents and civic leaders didn't give up. The City's Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) requested and obtained a Community Development Block Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"We had to come up with creative ways to solve the problem," said Kermit Mahan, executive director of HRA. "The key is to be aggressive and creative in putting together the funding."

But first the City and agencies contributing funds for the buyout program had to be assured no more homes would be constructed in the way of floodwaters. Flooding again damaged homes in 1983 and in 1993 when 450 homes were affected. Additional buyouts were conducted on a voluntary basis.

Because of the flood protection work of the city, flood insurance policyholders have lower premiums. Community participation is voluntary. The CRS schedule identified 18 creditable activities, organized under four categories. The City of Austin has received credit for 15 out of 18 activities. This has earned the City of Austin a Class 5 rating and a reduction of 25% in flood insurance premiums for policyholders.

Today, Alice Snater still worries about friends who live a few blocks from where her home previously resided in the flood plain. Because Austin has been successful with its buyout program in the past and continues to plan for future mitigation, Kermit Mahan said the city recently received a \$2 million grant from the state earmarked for flood relief.



Mower County,  
Minnesota



### Quick Facts

Sector:

**Private**

Cost:

**\$2,000,000.00 (Estimated)**

Primary Activity/Project:

**Acquisition/Buyouts**

Primary Funding:

**Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**