



Northfield, Vermont

From Property Buyouts to a Local Park — a Work in Progress

Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

- Buying and demolishing houses is time-consuming, from two to four years after the flooding.
- Historic properties needed additional review; requiring an architectural historian.
- Before demolition, structures were checked for asbestos, and asbestos must be removed.
- Drawings of a potential park, “having a vision,” helped generate support from the community.
- Designing a park in a floodway is challenging because of constraints of the site and varying community expectations.
- A hydrologic investigation of the site led to options for flood mitigation.
- The local university is helpful for study and design work.

What they did, and why:

In the Water Street neighborhood of Northfield Vermont, four-fifths of the homes were damaged in 2011 by spring flooding and Tropical Storm Irene. In order to lessen damages from future floods and restore part of the floodplain, the town has purchased and demolished 14 homes, and has plans to buy two more and elevate another two.

From 2011 to 2013, FEMA agreed to either buy or elevate properties in this area if they faced repairs costing half the value of the home or more. As a result of the buyouts, the town owns a 4-5 acre parcel with an easement for public access to the Dog River and plans are underway to create a park and flood storage area, as well as to restore native vegetation along the river.

The homes were purchased with funds from FEMA, through the Vermont Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, matched by U.S. HUD Disaster Relief funds through the Vermont CDBG Grant program and its sub-grantee, the Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission.



Benefits:

- Decrease in future flood damage to remaining homes in the neighborhood
- Creation of a park that will provide recreational amenities and access to a public natural area near the downtown
- Restoration of stream bank

“At a very difficult time for this neighborhood, the prospect of using the floodplain for a town park, and doing stream restoration work, brought in interest from local universities and others, that will benefit the town. We’ve also had time to think through a more comprehensive solution considering how to include parcels upstream and downstream from the future park.”

Michele Braun,
Town of
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