



Acquisition Project Proves Beneficial as Safety Measure and Recreational Avenue

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

Located at the confluence of the Menomonee River and Underwood Creek, the city of Wauwatosa has had a history of flooding since it was settled in the 1850s. After being inundated by floodwaters for 2 consecutive years (1997 and 1998), the city initiated an acquisition (buyout) project that not only moved residents out of harm's way, but also expanded a widely used park.



"We wanted to do a flood protection project. We needed to do some mitigation," said Nancy Welch, Director of Community Development. "We had homes that flooded repeatedly. Initiating a buy-out just seemed to make sense. These people had been flooded out so many times. They had had it," Welch continued.

In 1998, as a result of a flooding disaster, funding through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) became available to a number of counties in the State of Wisconsin. Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) approached the city to see if they would be interested in a mitigation project. The city of Wauwatosa applied for \$1,897,085 in HMGP funds to acquire and demolish 23 properties along State Street. FEMA provided \$1,626,073 in federal funds with the WEM and the city each providing \$271,012. The total project cost was \$2,168,097. The project was initiated in July 1998 and completed in July 2001.

The purpose of HMGP is to reduce the loss of life and property in future disasters by funding mitigation measures during the recovery phase of a disaster. FEMA provides up to 75 percent of the funding, with the remainder coming from the state or applicant or both. The state administers the program and selects the projects with approval by FEMA. Applicants, which must have FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plans, may be states, local governments, Indian tribes, or certain nonprofits. Funds can be used for long-term mitigation measures, including protection of public or private property.

Mitigation measures did not come to a halt with the acquisition funded by FEMA. The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewage District (MMSD) acquired an additional 65 properties along State Street and created a berm around the park. Pervious driveways and walkways were also added.

"We were also trying to prevent flooding of businesses located along the river. There was no ability to do anything there to protect them from flooding. So the idea was to design the park to flood," said Welch.

Commonly referred to as the Hart Park Project, mitigation measures in Hart Park resulted in the park more than doubling in size from its original 33 acres. With the removal of the structures, residents now enjoy the newly created performance stage, picnic shelters, baseball field, skateboard park, and rain garden.

Heavy rainfall in July 2010 brought floodwaters once more to the same area along State Street in the city of Wauwatosa. Hart Park, designed to hold a 100-year flood event at bay, had no problem with the reported 2 feet of floodwaters.

According to Welch, the Hart Park Project has been very much a community project. "We've had consistent support. The biggest thing that people were concerned about was they got confused when the land was cleared, and they thought the city was going to offer it up for development."

Under the Stafford Act, any land purchased with HMGP funds must be restricted to open space, recreational, and wetlands management uses in perpetuity. Most often, a local government takes responsibility but, even if a state or federal agency takes ownership of the land, the deed restrictions still apply. Property acquisition is one of many forms of hazard mitigation, but it is the most permanent form. It removes people from harm's way forever.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region V**

State: **Wisconsin**

County: **Milwaukee County**

City/Community: **Wauwatosa**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**

Hazard Type: **Flooding**

Activity/Project Type: **Acquisition/Buyouts**

Structure Type: **Wood Frame**

Activity/Project Start Date: **07/1998**

Activity/Project End Date: **07/2001**

Funding Source: **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**

Funding Recipient: **State Government**

Application/Project Number: **1180.007**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **\$2,168,097.00 (Actual)**

Non FEMA Cost: **542024**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **Yes**

Federal Disaster #: **1180 , 07/07/1997**

Federal Disaster Year: **1997**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**

Tested By Federal Disaster #: **1933 , 08/11/2010**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Yes**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: <http://www.wauwatosa.net>

Reference URL 2: <http://www.mmsd.com>

Main Points

No Main Points were entered.



Photo of two of the properties involved in a 1998 buyout project in Wauwatosa.



Performance stage and pervious driveway were constructed following property acquisition