



Austin Pre-Disaster Mitigation Saves Homes

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Mower County, Minnesota

Austin, MN - When the City of Austin, located in southern Minnesota, implemented their most recent mitigation project, no one expected to reap the benefits so soon. In 2007, the city acquired and removed 15 flood-prone homes in the Wildwood Park area, which had flooded six times between 1978 and 2004. The acquisitions couldn't have come sooner. In June of 2008, the Wildwood Park area was flooded again and every acquired, but now vacant, parcel was once again flooded.



The city and its 23,000 residents are no strangers to flood damage. Since 1978 the City of Austin has acquired 240 homes and businesses in order to remove them from the threat of flooding. These acquisitions have saved the city and State and Federal governments millions of dollars in losses avoided as a result of the mitigation efforts.

The City of Austin may be best known as the home of the Spam, the canned meat product. But beyond Spam, the city is proactive and progressive in reducing its flood threat. After experiencing a devastating flood in 1978, local officials began to realize the importance of mitigation in a city prone to floods. With Cedar River, Turtle Creek, and Dobbins Creek converging in the center of the city, hundreds of homes had been flooded in the 1978, 1983, 1993, 2000, and 2004 floods. This degree of damage was unbearable to the residents and frustrating to city leaders trying to protect homes and infrastructure.

In September of 2006, the City received a Pre-Disaster Mitigation Competitive (PDM-C) grant to purchase 15 homes in Wildwood Park along the Cedar River. During 2007, the City of Austin implemented their PDM-C grant and purchased 15 homes in the Wildwood Park neighborhood, which would have been flooded in their basements and to their first floor in 2008 if they had not been acquired.

The PDM-C grant was true mitigation at work: acquiring a flood-prone home before it was flooded again. In 2004, the Wildwood Park area had over \$575,000 in flood damages. Add that value to the five previous floods and the area has incurred over \$2.6 million in damages since 1978. The city worked with the Minnesota Homeland Security and Emergency Management as well as with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide PDM-C funding for the \$2.2 million dollar project. The city had already developed a Comprehensive Linear Park System to manage the acquired flood-prone properties so the open space can be enjoyed by all its citizens. The Wildwood Park acquisitions will now make it possible for the city to connect bike trails in parks across the city.

In addition to protecting the 15 homes, the PDM-C project enabled the city to remove the sanitary sewer service to that area, which alleviated sewer backup problems to an additional 36 homes located near the acquisition area but away from the threat of riverine flooding. These 36 homes are no longer prone to sewer backup resulting from the Wildwood Park overland flooding since all sewer connections were removed and the floodwaters are unable to enter the sanitary sewer system.

The 2008 flood was the third-worst flood in the city's history, being comparable to the devastating 1978 flood that damaged over 400 homes. But officials said this flood was far less devastating than floods in the past, and it was due to the mitigation projects. Infrastructure was the hardest hit with this flood, a good sign that the mitigation measures are doing what the city set out to do: protect its residents and their homes from flood damage.

The city has made flood mitigation one of its first and foremost priorities. There are mitigation projects planned through 2012 in order to complete their mitigation goal of removing or protecting all structures in the floodplain within the city. Although funding for all the projects has not been achieved, the city is continuing to seek and find funds, including the PDM-C program for Wildwood Park, so that the City of Austin can eliminate both the financial costs and emotional hardships of future floods. The city knows the floods won't stop, but their proactive mitigation projects mean the damages will stop.

Activity/Project Location

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

FEMA Region: **Region V**

State: **Minnesota**

County: **Mower County**

City/Community: **Austin**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**

Hazard Type: **Flooding**

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

Activity/Project Start Date: **01/2007**

Activity/Project End Date: **Ongoing**

Funding Source: **Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM)**

Funding Recipient: **Local Government**

Funding Recipient Name: **City of Austin**

Application/Project Number: **PDM FY07**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **Amount Not Available**

Non FEMA Cost: **0**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **No**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**

Tested By Federal Disaster #: **No Federal Disaster specified**

Year First Tested: **2008**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

Reference URLs

No URLs were submitted

Main Points

No Main Points were entered.