



FEMA

City of Eau Claire Acquisition

Eau Claire, WI - Historically flooding from the Chippewa River took its toll on residents of the Forest Street neighborhood in the City of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Starting in 1993, the city began to turn the tide on damages created by repetitive flooding when it implemented an acquisition program supported by FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.

From the devastation of flooding has grown a planned revitalization of downtown Eau Claire. The west central Wisconsin city is changing its vulnerability to flooding into a recreational and aesthetic amenity that is spurring downtown economic growth.

History is repeating itself in Eau Claire. The Eau Claire and Chippewa rivers first brought settlers to the area. Here, loggers capitalized on the bounty of the woods. The growing city on the river served as an economic center during the logging decades of the 1850s to 1880s. When that 'boom era' passed, the city rebuilt as an industrial and medical center for the surrounding agricultural industry. The city is in another phase of rebuilding its downtown, this time after the shopping malls and freeway corridors influenced the development of retail centers on the outskirts of town. The Chippewa River, now bordered with newly opened up green space, is once again bringing commerce to downtown Eau Claire.

Nearly every spring, houses in the Forest Street neighborhood on the northern edge of downtown and near the Chippewa River filled with floodwaters. The 100-year-old houses were deteriorating from successive flooding and age.

The third highest flood of record hit the city in 1993. People nicknamed it the 'Great Flood'. Homes in the Forest Street neighborhood were among the 75 structures in the city that had river water in the basements. The estimated cost to the city in damages and flood fighting was \$750,000.

The federal disaster declaration of 1993 triggered FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). Armed with HMGP funds, city officials acquired 50 properties in the five-block Forest Street neighborhood. "Although other areas of the city also incurred flooding, the city chose these homes to acquire because of the 100-percent participation by property owners in a concentrated area," said Donna Meier, Project and Acquisitions Coordinator for the city's Department of Finance. "Every year these homes were flooded. It was very destructive. People saw that they were much better off getting out of there and everyone agreed to sell."

In the summer of 2001, the City of Eau Claire approved ambitious plans for the space left vacant by the demolition of flood-prone homes and rental units. The 13.5-acre green space would be linked to another nearby redevelopment area along the river to form a riverfront park. The Redevelopment Plan introduction states, "The open space is readily accessible to downtown businesses, the government center, the University of Wisconsin campus and surrounding neighborhoods. The riverside edges of the site offer excellent views, water access, and an attractive urban destination in the heart of the city."

The buy-out of homes and resulting vacant acreage prompted the development of the park plan.



Eau Claire County, Wisconsin



Quick Facts

Sector:

Public

Cost:

\$2,557,143.00 (Actual)

Primary Activity/Project:

Acquisition/Buyouts

Primary Funding:

Hazard Mitigation Technical Assistance Program (HMTAP)