Strategic Recovery Planning Report

Post Sandy Planning Assistance Grant Program

Borough of South River

Middlesex County

New Jersey

Strategic Recovery Planning Report

Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery

Authorization # SRPR-2013-1223-01

March 1, 2014

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The original of this report was signed and sealed in accordance with N.J.S.A. 45:14A-1, et. Seq. and N.J.A.C. 13:41-1.1, et. Seq.

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March 2, 2014

Sean Thompson
Director, Local Planning Assistance
NJ Department of Community Affairs
101 S. Broad Street / P.O. Box 813
Trenton, NJ 08625

Re: Borough of South River
Middlesex County
Strategic Recovery Planning Report via
Community Development Block Grant-
Disaster Recovery

Introduction

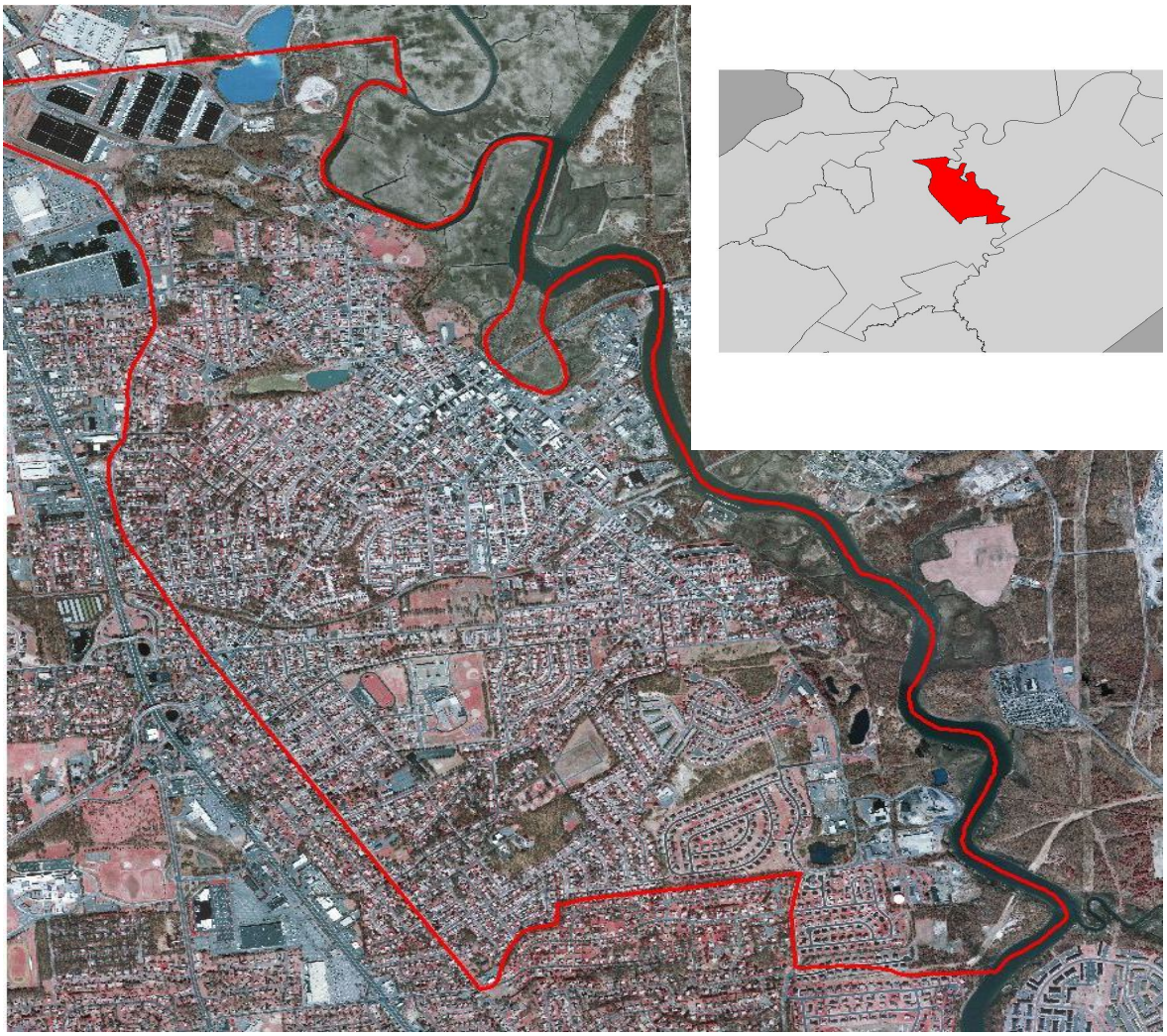
This Strategic Recovery Planning Report has been prepared in accordance with the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs' Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery Action Plan ("CDBG-DR") and the Post Sandy Planning Assistance Grant Program Description and Guidelines. The program engages professional planners to evaluate the impacts of Superstorm Sandy on the communities they serve. This evaluation focuses on planning goals, strategies, and priorities leading to real-world actions that are most urgently needed for public safety and disaster recovery. This Strategic Recovery Planning Report should serve as a guide for future actions -- not only to recover from the effects of Superstorm Sandy, but also to reduce vulnerabilities to future disasters. This report contains detailed storm impacts, descriptions of the projects proposed, implementation dates, and proposed funding sources for such projects.

Background

What is now The Borough of South River was originally formed as the Town of Washington within East Brunswick Township in 1870 and later incorporated as an independent borough by an Act of the New Jersey Legislature in 1898. The Borough is located in the central portion of Middlesex County, south of the Raritan River and east of the South River and contains a total area of 2.9 square miles of which, 2.8 square miles is land and 0.1 square miles is water. According to the US Census Bureau, the 2010 Borough population of the Borough was 16,008 persons. The municipality borders the Township of East Brunswick to the west and The Borough of Sayreville to the east. The Borough is named after the South River waterway which flows along that common municipal boundary between the Borough of South River and the Borough of Sayreville. The South River flows northward into the Raritan River near the Borough's northern boundary and is heavily impacted by tidal flow.

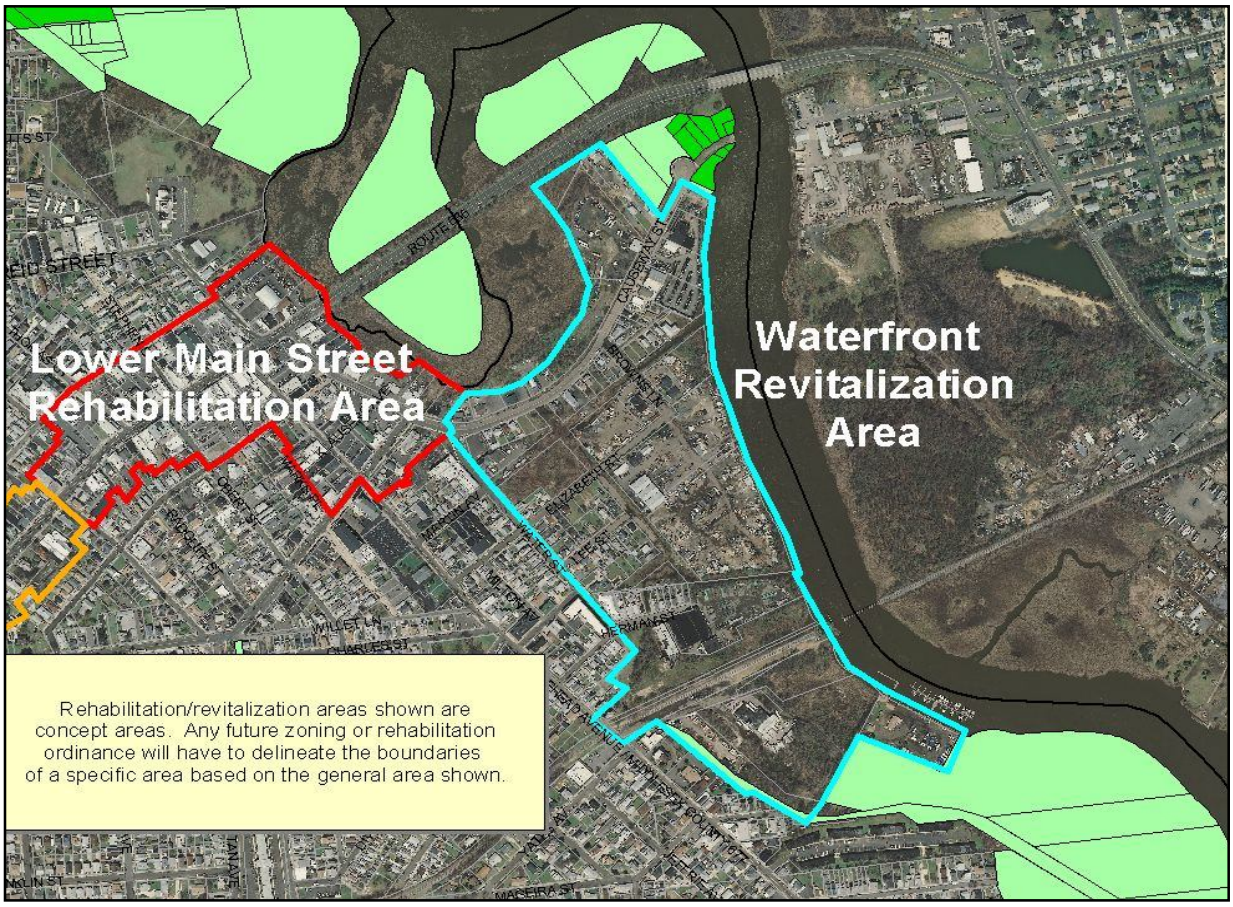
At the beginning of the 20th Century, because of its inland waterfront, the Borough was a magnate location for industrial manufacturing and shipping. Several dozen multi-story manufacturing buildings were built on the Boroughs eastern waterfront abutting the waterway. A dense development pattern of worker housing, hotels, and rooming and boarding houses were later constructed in neighborhoods surrounding these waterfront industries. Factories operated round-the-clock during both world wars producing equipment and textiles for the war effort and were staffed by a local resident workforce. Neighborhood commercial and civic uses were also built in these waterfront areas to support the residents residing there.

As manufacturing declined, the Borough suburbanized into the New York Metropolitan region. While economic revitalization has redeveloped many similar turn-of-the-century manufacturing buildings in surrounding communities, the Borough has experienced almost no redevelopment of these former waterfront manufacturing neighborhoods. To this day, the western floodplain of the South River remains developed with these neighborhoods of single-family residential homes, houses of worship, retail, commercial and former industrial/manufacturing uses. The outline of the 2.9 sq. mi. Borough is shown below where a western growth line can seen encroaching into the South River's floodplain. In some areas, development, including residential development has been built right up to the river.



South River has a History of Flooding Problems

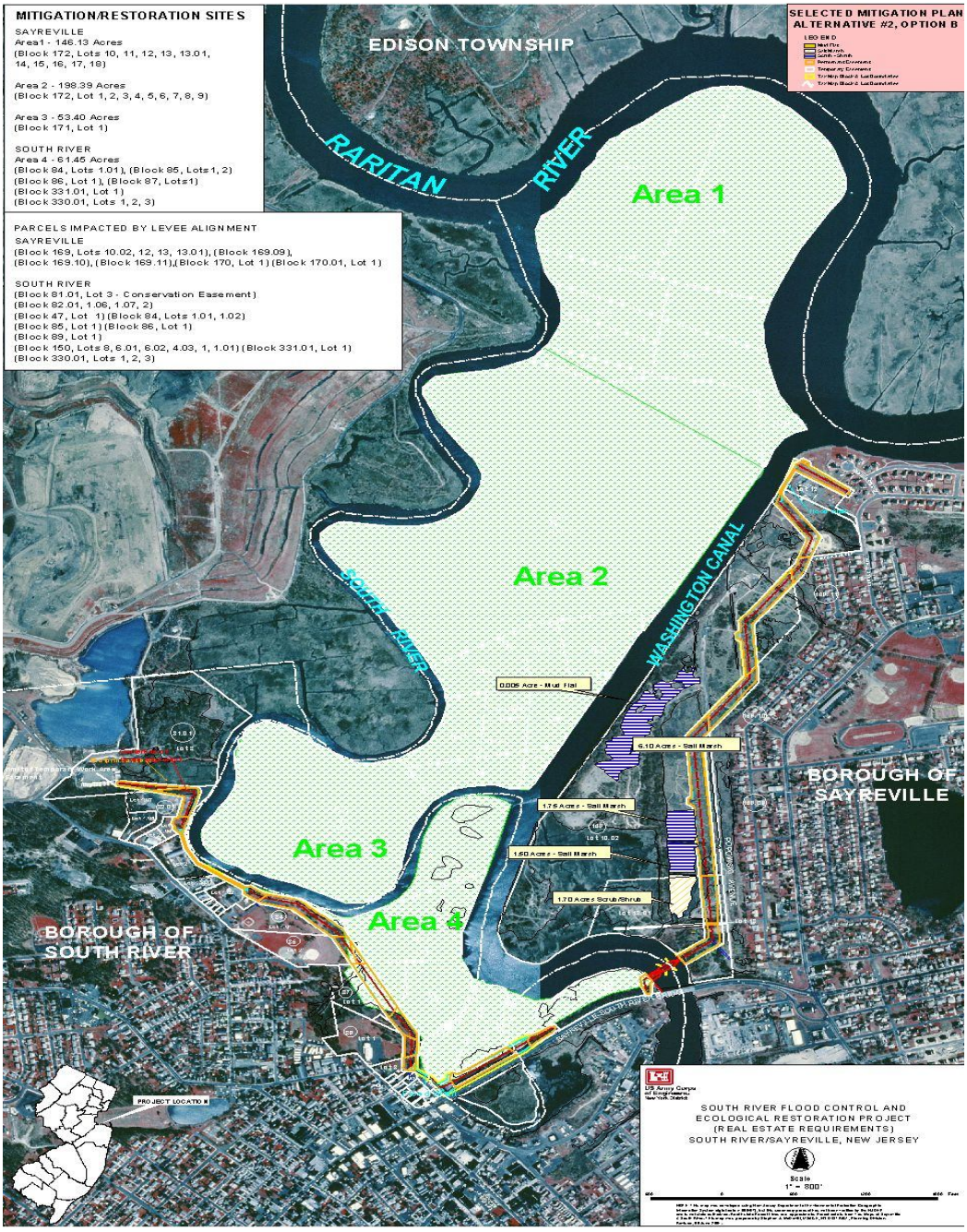
The Borough has a chronic history of flooding problems associated with the South River. The beds and banks of the South River are subject to tidal flooding when the river overflows during yearly storm events, Hurricanes, nor-easters, or even during times of non-storm high tide. The Borough's flooding problems mirror the issues in the neighboring Borough of Sayreville which experienced similar, although more publicized damage from Superstorm Sandy. Flood-prone neighborhoods generally fall into four geographic areas: east of Whitehead Avenue, the entire Waterfront Revitalization District, the Ferry/Reid Street Corridor, and north of Reid Street. For illustrative purposes, these areas are shown below in the map from the 2011 Master Plan highlighted in blue or overlaid in green. In the Waterfront



Revitalization Zone in particular, development has been constructed up to the banks of the South River.

The flood-prone waterway is the focus of a significant federal flood control project by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE). The Army Corps report classifies the flooding in the area as "imminent and severe." The flood project involves construction of "Hurricane and Storm Damage" protection surge barrier spanning the South River for a length of 320 feet, with a clear opening of 80 feet, and two (2) combined levees containing ±10,712 linear feet long with floodwalls (1,655 feet long) constructed along the east and west bank of the South River in the Boroughs of Sayreville and South

River. Interior drainage facilities and pump stations are also included in the design. Proposed areas for constructed wetlands and stormwater management are included in the design of the project. This flood control project has been fully designed and approved by the Army Corps of Engineers via the Water Resources Development Act of 2007. however, no construction has occurred as the United States Congress has yet to fund the project. Without the construction of the federal flood control measures, the Borough of South River suffers repetitive losses in flood-prone areas along its entire eastern municipal boundary. A graphic form the US Army Corps of Engineers is provided below showing the approved floodwall project below.



Pre-storm Planning Construct

Before the storm, development in the Borough of South River was guided by a 2011 Comprehensive Master Plan and 2012 Land Use Ordinance. These land use policies of the Borough have been formulated around the eventual construction of the USACOE levee and floodwall system. While the waiting for funding and construction, the Borough has used traditional planning and zoning to discourage development in the flood-prone areas. The 2011-2012 Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance revisions specifically created a "Waterfront Rehabilitation Zone" which prohibited development or intensification of residential uses. However, existing residential, commercial and industrial uses already existing in these areas remain prone to repetitive loss. The Borough of South River has strived to maintain the viability of these neighborhoods through multiple efforts including participation in FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program Community Rating System, federal; flood control participation, municipal code enforcement and municipal planning, however, repetitive flood damage has continued to occur and construction of the USACOE flood control project remains uncertain and unlikely.

Superstorm Sandy

On October 27, 2012 Governor Chris Christie declared a state of emergency for the State of New Jersey in advance of Hurricane Sandy. On October 28, 2012 President Barack Obama issued a federal emergency declaration for the State of New Jersey. On October 29, 2012 Mayor John Krenzel, issued an emergency declaration for the storm and the South River Police Department and Office of Emergency Management activated the Borough's reverse 9-1-1 system to notify residents of the oncoming situation. A mandatory evacuation of several streets was coordinated by the Borough's Emergency Management Coordinator. With the historical experience of several previous flood events in recent history, Borough leadership knew existing FEMA flood hazard elevation maps were reliable and would provide an accurate prediction model of how and where flooding would occur. The popular image below from thnt.com shows Sandy flooding on Herman Street.

On October 29, 2012, at approximately 9 pm, the tidal flooding combined with water from the storm surge overflowed the banks of the South River and poured into several neighborhoods along the eastern side of the Borough. Flooding was severe. The waterline was measured at 28 inches on Reid Street and as high as 40 inches on Washington Street. Most homes east of Water Street took on several feet of water on the ground floor. Diluted in with the water were particles of silt, mud and brackish foam carried in from the Raritan Bay. During the entirety of the storm, several multi-family apartment buildings were evacuated, dozens of businesses were submerged under several feet of water, and emergency services evacuated residents from single family homes with personal vehicles, boats and rescue squad wave-runner watercraft. After the water receded, low lying areas in the floodplain east of Water Street still contained standing water for several weeks after the storm.

Unique Impacts of Superstorm Sandy

The Borough of South River is unique in that it has its own municipal electric utility. The Borough owns its own electrical substations, transformers and distribution network situated in facilities throughout the Borough, and with "smart meters" installed at each meter box, can administer the entire network and monitor information relative to the availability and distribution of electric service. The Borough's utility infrastructure was located on high ground and not significantly damaged by the storm, however, the utility is a distribution system, not a power generation system. It receives a direct service feed from Public Service Electric and Gas Company (PSE&G). When the PSE&G service to the Borough's central electrical facility was lost, service to the 100% of the Borough was interrupted.

Damage to other municipal utilities and critical public facilities also occurred. The Borough's main sewage pumping station on Jackson Street was damaged when water entered the pump building and destroyed an auxiliary power generator. This facility was permanently destroyed and temporary pumps are still in place today. Similar damage occurred to the Jackson Street pumping station. The Borough's Firehouse on George Street had limited auxiliary power, but no water damage. The Borough's firehouse on Appleby Avenue had only limited auxiliary power. The Borough's Rescue Squad building and Police Station had limited auxiliary power. The Department of Public Works and municipal water tank facility had no electricity to power gasoline pumps for DPW or emergency vehicles and no electricity to operate the municipal water pumping station for domestic water or fire suppression. The Borough's human services building/office building on Reid Street was significantly damaged by flooding, particularly in the basement, ground floor and elevator shaft. That building remains inoperable almost 18 months after the storm. Additionally the comprehensive electric service loss rendered all Borough gasoline pumping stations, supermarkets and banking facilities inoperable.

Without electricity, building mechanicals and systems failed, including fire alarms, hallway and stairwell lights and water pumps. Water for both residential consumption and fire suppression thankfully never fell below critical levels. Emergency communications is often a major challenge during flood events as the Borough's communications systems is located in the basement of Police headquarters, a building which is prone to frequent flooding. Without electricity, wireless communications antennas did not work and cell phones were inoperable after a day or two. Police Department and Fire Department radio systems were powered by emergency back-up generators which needed to be refueled every few hours.

Ultimately, the service interruption lasted approximately 3 days before power could be restored from PSE&G. Over 4,000 homes and businesses in the Borough lost electrical power. The Borough's electric utility was able to recover almost immediately after restoration of the main PSE&G service feed. However, turning the electricity back on to individual buildings created a significant danger as flood water was still present in several neighborhoods. Municipal workers, admittedly unqualified to do so, were, in the interest of public safety, disabling electric meters and service connections from buildings which were deemed too dangerous to re-energize.

Superstorm Sandy Damage Assessment

Like many other communities in central New Jersey and the Jersey Shore, the Borough of South River in Middlesex County continues to recover from Superstorm Sandy. While much of the most notable damage from the hurricane occurred in shorefront areas of Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean and Atlantic Counties, the Borough of South River, along with The Borough of Sayreville, was one of the few inland communities with heavy flooding damage and significant ratable loss due to flood damage.

Following Superstorm Sandy, the Borough Tax Assessor's office has calculated the storm caused major property damage, resulting in a loss of approximately $7.4 million dollars of total assessed value and approximately $3.7 million of losses in damages including permanent land value adjustments due to flooding. A majority of the flood damage was concentrated in areas on the Borough's eastern floodplain in the neighborhoods of Water, Lee, Elizabeth, Russell, and Martin Streets.

Superstorm Sandy Fiscal Impacts on the Borough of South River Property	
2012 Totals	
Total Assessed Value:	$ 420,807,700
Verizon PP:	$ 293,382
Total:	$ 421,101,082 *2012 Tax Point: 42,110
2013 Totals	
Total Assessed Value:	$ 413,398,600
Verizon PP:	$ 287,694
Total:	$ 413,686,294 *2013 Est. Tax Point: 41,368
Total Loss in ratable:	$ 7,414,788
Loss in Tax Points	3.34
Loss due to Hurricane:	$ 3,699,000 excluding land value loss.
Source: M. Frangella Borough Tax Assessor	

State Intervention by Governor Christie

The Borough was visited by Governor Chris Christie in July 2013 where he announced that the State of New Jersey has made $39 million of federal funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency

available for the purchase of 129 homes in the South River and Sayreville area. South River's allocation consists of $11.9 million of the $39 million grant. The Borough is now coordinating with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Blue Acres Program (Green Acres Department) who will be administering the program. In total the program includes the acquisition of approximately 76 properties in the Borough's floodplain neighborhoods. Local media has covered the story and buyout progress extensively in several news articles in the annex of this report.

Reshaping Planning Goals and Documents

Until Superstorm Sandy, the Planning Goals of the area had been focused on rehabilitation and re-development of the Waterfront areas in anticipation of the construction of the Army Corps levee and floodwall project. Now, the planning goals of the community have to be drastically realigned and reshaped reflect the fact that approximately 76 individual properties will likely be acquired, demolished, and turned into open space. This process, by the nature of the NJDEP acquisition program is entirely an administrative endeavor, and is removed from traditional planning, public input, comprehensive master planning, or a land use zoning process. As such, the need arises for a reshaping of the promulgated land use policies of the Borough. Additionally, the Borough recognizes that, should the acquisition and demolition be successful, the Army Corps levee project may never be constructed. As construction of the levee was a key assumption in the formulation of the Waterfront Revitalization Zone, the need further arises for a reshaping of the promulgated land use policies of the Borough. Finally, after the property acquisition is complete, the Borough recognizes that up to 76 dwelling units will be eliminated from the Boroughs taxable property list. The fiscal impact of this action needs to be analyzed. The July 2013 image below with NJ Governor Chris Christie and South River Mayor John Krenzel to his left comes via worldnews.com.

Community, Economic and Public Safety Need

The retention of viable commercial, residential and industrial properties is critical for residents and the economy of the Borough. However, the floodplain areas in question are of constant concern for municipal officials and property owners, and are seen as a public safety risk by code enforcement, emergency personnel and residents. The Borough of South River intends to use all available planning efforts to improve community resilience and economic vitality by engaging the community, informing Borough leadership on the impacts of the planning process and creating a mapping and management system for administrators to monitor and report to the public on the acquisition process, and its impacts. The Borough intends to continue to coordinate planning, zoning, and capital improvements related to flood prevention and management with the Borough Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance. All efforts are aimed at improving community health and safety and flood resiliency. In the case of South River Borough, storm resiliency in the floodplain neighborhoods will come by way of property acquisition and permanent removal of residential property from these areas.

Priorities for Action Plan

The Borough of South River has developed the following recovery and resiliency planning goals to address existing vulnerabilities and mitigate future flooding and disaster events. Any and all of these forthcoming initiatives can be anticipated to be the subject of forthcoming planning grant application(s):

1. ***Decrease reliance on federal flood control facilities as a primary means of property protection***
   The Borough has been waiting for constriction of the Army Corps of Engineers Flood Control project for almost two decades and has lost faith in the federal government's ability to follow through on construction of this project. However, with the acquisition of 129 flood prone properties in both The Borough South River and the Borough of Sayreville, this project may never to be constructed. If the acquired properties are removed from the flood areas, the floodwalls and levees may no longer be necessary or cost-effective as the "imminent" flood danger would only be to vacant land. With this change in focus, the Borough should consider meeting with the Governor's staff, FEMA Representatives, and US Army Corp of Engineers representatives to determine how, if at all, the flood control project is affected by the Blue Acres acquisition program. Further, focusing on the recently acquired properties, the Borough should examine if any flood control and/or stormwater management facilities are appropriate for the acquired area. If the renewed policy framework is to, "*make room for the river",* incorporation of green infrastructure and sustainable practices should be considered for these areas where practicable. If the acquired homes will become permanent open space, green infrastructure improvements may be uniquely suited for these emerging areas.

2. ***Participate in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Community Rating System***
   Participation in the Community Rating System ("CRS") of the National Flood Insurance Program will ultimately reduce homeowners' flood insurance premiums by as much as 45%. To participate, the Borough must take certain actions relative to its repetitive loss properties, including mapping of the surrounding areas which constitute a "repetitive loss area." Repetitive loss areas include repetitive loss properties found on FEMA's repetitive claim list and neighboring buildings that were subject to the same flood as those on FEMA's list.

3. ***Map Repetitive Loss Areas in conjunction with the Community Rating System Requirements and use that mapping to create a Property Acquisition Management Plan***

The Borough leadership has made a significant policy change and now believes that acquisition of flood damaged property is a better policy alternative to flood control protection. This change recognizes that property owners in floodplain areas subject to repeated flood damage can not economically bear the cost of mitigation above FEMA's Advisory Base Flood Elevation levels.

Approximately 194 homes and businesses in the Borough have been significantly damaged by Sandy. Of that 194, approximately 40 buildings have been classified by FEMA as "Substantially Damaged/Substantial Improvement" and are listed on the Borough's Impacted Properties List. Many of the affected properties have been subject to flood damage 3 times in the last 6 years. As such, the Borough as applied for a Hazard Mitigation Grant under FEMA#4086-DR-NJ for a grant amount of $35,000,000 (thirty-five million dollars) for the acquisition of 194 specific properties. At the time of this report, many of these properties were vacant.

4. ***Create a Property Acquisition Management Plan & Mapping System***

Within these areas, the Borough is encouraging all eligible properties to participate in the Blue Acres acquisition programming while the opportunity is available. Also within these areas, properties not eligible for the Blue Acres program will continue to guided by 2011 Master Plan and 2011 Zoning Ordinance. This change places less reliance on the ACOE flood control project, and more emphasis on a "make room for the river" approach.

While the property acquisition and demolition costs of participating in this program are provided by state and federal sources, administration and coordination of the program will be a burden placed entirely on the Borough. Borough administrators are desirous of a mapping plan and management system to track and analyze the progress of the Blue Acres buyout efforts. This needs to be done by means of monitoring subject properties through the stages of eligibility, acquisition, buyout, title assumption, demolition, and ultimately addition to the borough's open space inventory. This monitoring needs to be shown both spatially, via electronic, real-time mapping applications, and financially, via a fiscal impact analysis.

5. ***Create a Hardening Plan for Critical Community Facilities including municipal utilities and infrastructure***

In conjunction with PSEG's "Energy Strong" program and the availability of funding, the Borough of South River desires to harden, and/or relocate critical community facilities to deliver un-interrupted emergency management services during disaster events.

First priority critical community facilities should include the police headquarters, the Borough's two fire stations, rescue squad building, the municipal water and public works facilities on Ivan Way, and all of the Boroughs electrical utility, water and sewerage pumping substations. These facilities have been determined to be especially susceptible or extremely critical to emergency operations. Second priority facilities include all facilities used as shelters, food stores, fuel stations, banking institutions as well as residential buildings with large at-risk populations including seniors and the disabled.

This goal should include an application to the State of New Jersey's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program for funding to purchase and install natural gas powered emergency back-up generators for critical community facilities listed above. Damage to the above critical community facilities and municipal infrastructure highlights the need for a rational municipal facilities plan and investment strategy. The Borough should consider submitting an application to the NJ Department of Community Affairs ("NJ DCA") for Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery ("CDBG-DR") funding to prepare a Municipal Hazard Mitigation Plan or a 5 year Capital Improvement Plan. If funded, these plans will be completed in one year.

5. ***Continue Improved Public Communication and Emergency Notification***

South River has multiple capabilities of emergency notification the Borough already employs, including Reverse 9-1-1 and CodeRed Alerts, (similar to Nixle) as well as social media updates.

The Borough's office of emergency management should consider an application to the State of New Jersey for Hazard Mitigation Grant funding to engage in a public information and awareness campaign to advise residents of natural and man-made hazards, what to do in future disaster situations, and recommend that citizens put together preparedness plans or emergency kits. Awareness campaign materials may be considered in several languages.

Plan for future proposals

To facilitate the above policy changes, the Borough intends to submit one or more grant applications to the NJ DCA for CDBG-DR funding to prepare a series of planning elements to create a Floodplain Neighborhood Acquisition Plan: Management & Mapping System (Neighborhood Plan) to address the comments of this Strategic Recovery Planning Report. Projected project completion is one (1) year after project authorization. ***The Borough may opt to seek funding for one or more of the following elements of that comprehensive planning framework. Further, Borough may seek to combine one or more of the following elements into a single grant application, depending on the progress of the pending buyout program:***

Element I - Creation of an electronic "Repetitive Loss Area" Map to meet CRS requirements. Creation of a Flood Damaged Property Map and Planning Information Profile (Master Plan Analysis, Zoning Analysis, Flood Zone Analysis, Damage Assessment, and Repetitive Loss Assessment) for each affected property. This element should also identify vulnerable critical infrastructure in the Borough in reference to flood hazard areas. Projected Grant Amount: $50,000.00 to be completed within one year of grant approval date.

Element II - Creation of a Property Acquisition Eligibility Map & Targeting Plan. Creation of a Blue Acres Transition Status Map & Acquisition Mapping Management System to track the process of participating properties in their transition from SD/SI status to final Blue Acres Property. Projected Grant Amount: $50,000.00 to be completed within one year of grant approval date.

Element III - Preparation of a Ratable Replacement Plan/Fiscal Impact Analysis reflecting possible acquisition acceptance scenarios of 25%, 50%, 75% and 95% acquisition rates, and their impact on the local economy and the finances of the municipality. Projected Grant Amount: $20,000.00 to be completed within one year grant approval date.

Element IV - A Post-Sandy Neighborhood Proposed Land Use Plan element, which would be adopted as an amendment to the 2011 Municipal Master Plan. This proposed master plan amendment would recognize the modified land use goals and realities of the areas affected by the superstorm, and their ultimate transition into Blue Acres open space. Projected Grant Amount: $30,000.00 to be completed within one year grant approval date.

Element V - A Post-Sandy Zoning Ordinance Revision which would reconcile with the above Master Plan amendments with the Borough's Land Use and Development Ordinance. This proposed ordinance amendment/revision would codify the changes to the Zoning Map and text of the Zoning Ordinance to recognize the significant policy changes to the land use element of the Master Plan described above. Projected Grant Amount: $30,000.00 to be completed within one year of final property acquisition.

Public Participation and Comment

This Strategic Recovery Planning Report has been prepared in accordance with the regulations governing the CDBG-R and NJDCA SRPR process. Independent of these requirements, it is a well-established principal of participatory Democracy and Community Planning that significant changes in land use policy be made available for public comment and be informed by public participation in the final decision-making process. It is therefore recommended that this report to be made publically available on the Borough Website and be the subject of a public hearing at before the South River Planning Board. Although not proposed as a formal Master Plan amendment at this time, the Planning Board may wish to make specific recommendations to the Borough Council relative to the findings of this report. Comments should also be solicited relative to rebuilding strategies, code and ordinance solutions, green building and environmental sustainability options and long-term viability of borough-wide infrastructure. Following public comments, the Borough Council may consider adopting this report as a framework document.

Comparison with Other Plans

This Strategic Recovery Planning Report has been prepared in accordance and is consistent with the
New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan,
The New Jersey Department of Community Affairs 2013 Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recover Action Plan the Borough of South River 2011 Master Plan and the Borough of South River 2010 Floodplain Management Plan.

Certification

The original of this report was signed and sealed in accordance with N.J.S.A. 45:14A-1, et seq. and N.J.A.C. 13:41-1.1, et seq.

Very truly yours,

Todd Bletcher, AICP, PP
For the Firm

and

Henry Bignell, PP
For the Firm

HB/TB
cc: Fredrick C. Carr, CM, Borough Administrator
John Krenzel, Mayor
Michael Beck, Planning Board Chairman
Nicholas Nassiff, AICP, PP, NJDCA Planner
File #13-1141

Appendix

I. US Army Corps of Engineers - New York District, *FACT SHEET* - South River, Raritan Basin.

II. *Christie Administration To Host Sandy Recovery Mobile Cabinet in South River,* November 12th, Informational Flyer.

III. *NJ DEP to receive $2.89 million to complete Sayreville buyouts and demolition*, Lloyd Nelson, NJ.com January 28, 2014.

IV. *Owners of homes hit by Superstorm Sandy in limbo waiting on buyout offers*, Associated Press, September 15, 2013.

V. 76 *South River homes targeted for buyouts with $11.9 million federal grant*, Erin O'Neill, The Star-Ledger, August 07, 2013.

VI. *N.J. Post-Sandy Buyout Offers Start in South River, Sayreville*, Insurance Journal/Bloomberg, July 16, 2013.

VII. South River homeowners mull buyouts after Hurricane Sandy, The Associated Press / NJ.com, July 28, 2013

VIII. Eight homes purchased in South River under buyout program. NJ.com, Available :mycentraljersey.com, Mar. 6, 2014.

IX. *Giving New Jerseyans Choice In Recovery: Christie Administration "Willing Seller" Plan Provides Homeowners Options and Flexibility to Sell Sandy-Damaged Homes In Flood-Prone Areas,* New Jersey Office of Recovery and Building.

X. *Christie Administration Makes 272 Post-Sandy home buyouts offers in Sayreville and South River*. New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. Available Online: NJDEP Press Release, January 9, 2014.

FACT SHEET - South River, Raritan Basin, US Army Corps of Engineers - New York District

Flood Damage Reduction and Ecosystem Restoration

DESCRIPTION: The project area is located within the lower Raritan Basin in Middlesex County, New Jersey. The South River is the first major tributary of the Raritan River, located approximately 8.3 miles upstream of the Raritan River's mouth at Raritan Bay. The South River is tidally controlled from its mouth upstream to Duhernal Lake Dam. Fluvial conditions prevail upstream of the dam. The area is prone to imminent and severe flooding from hurricanes and other storms, with significant flood events occurring in March 1962, May 1968, August and September 1971, April 1984, December 1992, March 1993. For example, the March '93 northeaster [a 25-year] event resulted in approximately $17 million in damages [2001 dollars] and closed the highway bridge connecting the Boroughs of South River and Sayreville. Based on coordination with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection [NJDEP], county and local interests, it was determined that there are no widespread flooding problems in the South River watershed upstream of the Duhernal Lake Dam. Consequently, the study area focused on river reaches downstream of the dam, specifically flood-prone areas within the Boroughs of South River and Sayreville, the Township of Old Bridge, and the Historic Village of Old Bridge [located within the Township of East Brunswick]. This portion of South River also includes the areas of greatest ecological degradation [and greatest potential for ecosystem restoration].

AUTHORIZATION: The project was authorized for construction in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 [Public Law 110-114] on November 8, 2007. The feasibility report, completed in September 2002, recommended hurricane and storm damage [HSD] protection from a 500-year event and ecosystem restoration of 379.3 acres of degraded wetlands. The HSD protection component of the plan consists of a storm surge barrier spanning the South River for a length of 320 feet, with a clear opening of 80 feet, two combined levees [10,712 feet long]/floodwalls [1,655 feet long] constructed along the east and west bank of the South River in the boroughs of Sayreville and South River, and interior drainage facilities [i.e., pump station, outlets, etc.]. The ecosystem restoration consists of returning 379.3 acres of Common Reed [Phragmites sp.] wetlands to wetland forest, upland forest, low emergent marsh, mudflat, and open water.

STATUS: A Design Agreement [DA] was executed between the Corps of Engineers and the NJDEP in July 2004 initiating the current Preconstruction Engineering and Design [PED] phase. The 2004 DA costs were estimated at $4,071,250 at a 75-25 cost share [75% Federal and 25% non-Federal]. The New York District is currently working on the Flood Damage Reduction portion of the project. A site survey effort was undertaken in 2009 and completed in Fiscal Year 2010. The effort included: aerial photography, topographic mapping, a bathymetric survey, and a utility survey. This survey information is a key component and catalyst for the development for the upcoming Engineering Design Report [EDR]. Last year, the District worked on the levee height determination and levee alignment in Sayreville. In Fiscal Year 2012, the New York District will be focusing on the preparation of the EDR, Cultural Resource Investigations, updating the project management plan and the economic benefits, and design of the first constructible element in Sayreville. In Fiscal Year 2013, the New York District will finalize design of the first constructible element, and start the internal and external process of technical and peer reviews of the EDR and plans and specifications of the first constructible element.

CONTACT: Ronald Pinzon, Project Manager, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District, Programs and Project Management Division, Civil Works Branch , 26 Federal Plaza, Room 2134, New York, NY 10278-0090. Phone: [917] 790-8627, FAX: [212] 264-2924, Ronald.r.pinzon@usace.army.mil

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS: Frank Pallone NJ-06, Rush Holt NJ-12

Current as of February 2013

Available:
http://www.nan.usace.army.mil/Media/FactSheets/FactSheetArticleView/tabid/11241/Article/9713/fact-sheet-south-river-raritan-basin.aspx

Christie Administration To Host Sandy Recovery Mobile Cabinet in South River on November 12th
Representatives From Various State Departments And Federal Agencies Will Be On Hand In South River

WHAT: Mobile Recovery Cabinet to Assist Sandy-Impacted Homeowners/businesses
WHEN: 3:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Tuesday, November 12, 2013
WHERE: South River Middle School Cafe-Auditorium
3 Montgomery Street South River, NJ

Trenton, NJ – The Christie Administration announced today that state officials will host a Sandy Recovery Mobile Cabinet in South River to offer assistance to Sandy-affected residents and businesses as they continue their recovery and rebuilding efforts. State representatives from the Governor's Office of Constituent Relations; the Department of Community Affairs (DCA); the Economic Development Authority (EDA); the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP); the Department of Banking and Insurance (DOBI); the Department of Treasury; the Business Action Center (BAC) at the Department of State; the Department of Human Services (DHS); and the Department of Children and Families (DCF); as well as federal officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), will be on hand in South River to meet with affected residents and answer questions on a variety of topics including homeowner and rental program status updates and business grant and loan status updates. Homeowners and business owners interested in attending can expedite the process by bringing relevant documentation related to the issue they are facing.

WHO: Governor's Office of Constituent Relations
Department of Community Affairs
Economic Development Authority
Department of Environmental Protection
Department of Banking and Insurance
Department of Treasury
Department of State – Business Action Center
Department of Human Services
Department of Children and Families
Division of Consumer Affairs
Federal Emergency Management Agency
National Flood Insurance Program

NJ DEP to receive $2.89 million to complete Sayreville buyouts and demolitions

By Lloyd Nelson/NJ.com
on January 28, 2014

Homes on Weber Avenue in Sayreville were among dozens of buildings that were targeted for federally funded buyouts in the wake of Hurricane Sandy.*Saed Hindash/The Star-Ledger*

SAYREVILLE - U.S. Rep Frank Pallone, Jr. announced that the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection will receive an additional $2.896 million to finalize buyouts and demolition of 196 flood prone properties in Sayreville.

This grant will fund the remaining 25 percent of the buyouts that are already planned.

The project, started in 2013, was originally awarded $43.293 million which covered 75 percent of the project's total costs.

However, the state has now decided to cover 100 percent of the full cost of the project.

This grant is awarded through the Federal Emergency Management Agency Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, and was made possible through the Sandy Aid package.

"This grant will help to lessen the financial hit that our local governments still face as communities continue to recover from Sandy," Pallone said. "This funding will bring much needed relief to homeowners in Sayreville who have repeatedly suffered and struggled to put the pieces back together after each flood. As extreme weather becomes more and more frequent due to climate change, I'm pleased that the Sandy Aid package has allowed for steps like these buyouts to mitigate future storm damage and costs."

Pallone has met with a number of Sayreville homeowners who have faced severe and repetitive damages to their homes from flooding, and he fought to secure funding for their buyouts. In a March 2013 letter to

Governor Christie on the State's proposal to use Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, Pallone called for full funding to aid the homeowners.

Owners of homes hit by Superstorm Sandy in limbo waiting on buyout offers

By Associated Press on September 15, 2013 at 9:00 PM

Bob and Pat Smith sit in the dining room of their home in South River, N.J. They say they have seen many floods in their 47 years on Water Street, but none as severe as in Superstorm Sandy. *(AP File Photo)*

An appraiser sent by the state recently assessed the value of Bob and Pat Smith's house, nearly a year after floodwaters from Superstorm Sandy reached midway up the living room walls. Like the 75 other homeowners living near New Jersey's South River who qualify for buyouts, the Smiths are waiting to hear how much the state will offer to tear down their home of 47 years and have them relocate out of harm's way.

Hundreds of New Jersey residents are like the Smiths, displaced by the worst storm in state history and eligible for a buyout but unconvinced the offer will be high enough for them to move — and uncertain what to do next.

After the late October storm forced thousands of residents from their low-lying homes, Gov. Chris Christie announced plans to accelerate the flood buyout program known as Blue Acres by having federal storm-aid funds help cover costs. The administration targeted 1,300 properties in tidal areas and the Passaic River basin at a cost of $300 million. Three-quarters of the money will come from FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, with state Department of Environmental Protection covering the rest.
So far, 272 homes in Sayreville and South River have been identified for purchase in neighborhoods that were extensively flooded by the Raritan and South rivers. The cost of buying those homes and returning the property to wetlands is $55.1 million.

The program is voluntary, but the governor's intent is to buy up contiguous parcels, not create a checkerboard of homes and vacant lots.

In the first Sayreville neighborhood targeted, the pot of money to buy out 129 eligible homes is $29.5 million. Fifty-four property owners have received offers ranging from the low-$200s to the low-$300s,

borough business administrator Dan Frankel said. Eleven homeowners have accepted, and one has said no, according to DEP spokesman Larry Hajna.

The first closings could happen as soon as this month. That leaves 42 owners who are either undecided or displeased with the offer. “We’re having a couple of hiccups, which we’re working though,” Frankel acknowledged. “The appraisal process has been a big bone of contention. Emotionally, the residents are shot.”

The offers are based on a home’s pre-Sandy value minus any post-storm aid the homeowner has received. Property owners dissatisfied with the state’s offer can hire their own and file an appeal. Before that happens, however, the DEP agreed to review the offers it has made in Sayreville to see if adjustments need to be made.

Many of the residents have experienced previous home flooding, and some have replaced, remodeled and rebuilt several times. But moving also presents a wrenching choice that can be both financially vexing and emotionally challenging.
Ultimately, the homeowners may have little choice but to accept the state’s offer.

Homeowners with a mortgage are required to carry flood insurance, which could become unaffordable if they refuse a buyout, said South River administrator Fred Carr. The only other way to mitigate the flood hazard is to lift a home so it complies with FEMA’s new flood maps; in Sayreville and South River, that could mean raising a house by as much as 15 feet, depending on where it’s located. Grants of as much as $150,000 are available.
Christie announced last week that FEMA has approved another $13.8 million for buyouts of 67 more tracts in Sayreville. In neighboring South River, $11.9 million has been allocated for 76 parcels, with appraisals scheduled to be done by Friday, Hajna said.

State officials held preliminary meetings in Woodbridge and Old Bridge, but no announcements about buyouts in those towns have been made.
Meanwhile, Pat Smith is planning to host Thanksgiving dinner in her newly remodeled dining room. The Smiths don’t know where they’ll be living at this time next year, but they don’t think it will be on Water Street.

76 South River homes targeted for buyouts with $11.9 million federal grant

By Erin O'Neill/The Star-Ledger on August 07, 2013

South River resident Michael Palazzolo speaks to Gov. Chris Christie about the damage to his home from Hurricane Sandy. Christie's office announced today that the federal government has awarded $11.9 million to the state to buy out 76 houses in the Middlesex County borough.

The federal government has allotted New Jersey nearly $12 million to buy dozens of homes in South River, state officials announced today. The grant awarded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency is part of the state's plan to spend $300 million in disaster relief aid to purchase 1,000 properties in areas impacted by Hurricane Sandy and 300 more homes near the Passiac River that have repeatedly flooded. The state Department of Environmental Protection is administering the federal money, which comes from the $60 billion disaster relief package Congress passed in January, through its Blue Acres program.

South River and Sayreville are the first towns to be targeted under the program. Gov. Chris Christie's office said in a press release today that the $11.9 million in Hazard Mitigation Grand funding will buy 76 homes in South River. In July, Christie said that the federal government approved buyouts for 129 homes in Sayreville.

South River Mayor John Krenzel said, "I'm very pleased that they're moving ahead and what's even more pleasing is that the governor, when he went to Sayreville, he said, 'this is going to move quickly.' And it's surprising how quickly it is moving." Krenzel said the buyout program is "bittersweet" for homeowners, but he said, "they're tired. After all these years constantly having flooding — and it's only been getting worse, it's not getting better — they've decided it's time to go." Homes purchased through the buyout program will be demolished and maintained as open space.

The 76 properties in South River targeted in the buyout program are located at: Armstrong Avenue, Augusta Street, Belmont Avenue, Causeway, Elizabeth Street, Freeman Street, Herman Street, Kathryn Street, Lee Street, Levinson Avenue, Little Martin Avenue, Maple Street, Martin Avenue, Reid Street, Washington Street and Water Street.

South River borough administrator Frederick Carr said that there is more interest in the buyout program beyond the 76 homes currently approved. He said there may be another 20 to 30 homeowners at least who wish to participate in the program.

N.J. Post-Sandy Buyout Offers Start in South River, Sayreville

July 16, 2013 Insurance Journal/Bloomberg

New Jersey is making the first post-Hurricane Sandy buyout offers to South River and Sayreville homeowners this week, Governor Chris Christie said.

Gov. Christie announced the first post-Sandy buyout offers were made this week to Sayreville homeowners, who have been offered pre-storm value for their properties.(Governor's Office/Tim Larsen)

The state plans to spend $39 million of federal funds on the first 129 homes, Christie said in South River on Tuesday.

Those homes have been approved for buyouts by FEMA. The total cost of the program is $300 million, according to Christie's office.

Dozens more offers are expected in the next four to six weeks, Christie's office said. The governor said the state aims to buy out 1,300 flood-prone homes from willing sellers, including 1,000 that were damaged by Sandy.

South River homeowners mull buyouts after Hurricane Sandy

By The Associated Press / NJ.com on July 28, 2013

South River resident Michael Palazzolo speaks to Gov. Chris Christie about the damage to his home from Hurricane Sandy. South River is one of the neighborhoods the state is targeting with buyout offers. *(Tim Larsen/Governor's Office)*

— Bob and Pat Smith have seen many floods in their 47 years on Water Street, but none as severe as in Superstorm Sandy. Last year's storm waters rose halfway up their front door and left a debris field of mud and mold that took months to clean. In their early 70s and semi-retired, the Smiths say they'll contemplate a government buyout.

Tom Deltz, who lives at the end of Lee Avenue closest to the South River, says flood insurance helped defray the $70,000 it cost to replace heating and cooling systems, rewire his property and buy furniture and appliances after thigh-deep flood waters invaded the ranch home he built 21 years ago. He was among the first to return after living with a sister for four months, and he wants to stay put.

Mary Rasmussen, who has assembled a makeshift kitchen on a first-floor landing months after flood waters topped the kitchen counters, is frustrated after spending many hours applying for storm aid and getting no grants in 8½ months. "We don't want to move," she says, summing up the feeling of many in the neighborhood. "Yet we're afraid to stay."

The South River homeowners are among 281 in the Middlesex County borough and adjacent Sayreville targeted for the first post-Sandy buyouts under New Jersey's Blue Acres program. Under the program, the state purchases and demolishes flood-prone homes, then returns the property to wetlands.

The homeowners spoke with The Associated Press, which is tracking them throughout the buyout process, as they grapple with the wrenching choice of whether to stay or go, a decision they are finding both financially vexing and emotionally challenging.

Pat Smith tears up as she talks about wanting to spend one last Christmas in the two-story house her four children grew up in. Deltz, 58, doubts that he'd be able to find housing for himself comparable to the

corner property he has now with a fenced-in yard for his four dogs. And Rasmussen, who has been trying to sock away enough money so she can retire, doesn't want a mortgage at age 68.

Ultimately, it will be a choice to move on or elevate the house and face significantly higher flood insurance premiums or, for those who own their homes outright, roll the dice and not carry insurance.

When Gov. Chris Christie stood in front of the Smiths' house this month to announce that 76 homes here were eligible for buyouts from a $300 million pot of federal post-Sandy aid, he made it clear there would be no government takeovers of homeowners' land.

"We want to work cooperatively with people," Christie said. "People who want to sell, we're ready to help them buy out. People who want to stay, as long as they comply with the new rules to make their property stronger, then we'll be supportive of that."

In all, the state hopes to buy 1,000 homes that flooded during Sandy, the worst storm in state history, and about 300 in the Passaic River basin that flood repeatedly. The state is interested in buying back blocks or neighborhoods, not creating a checkerboard of homes and vacant lots, Christie says. Just like any other real estate transaction, it won't be final until the deed changes hands.

Low-lying neighborhoods in Woodbridge and Old Bridge will be targeted next in what has been an ambitious acceleration of Blue Acres, which had a budget of $60 million a year before Sandy. Cumberland County officials have also expressed interest in buyouts, while shore communities have not.

Borough administrator Fred Carr, who has been assisting the state with the local buyout program, said the idea was raised in December when frazzled flood victims asked for help during a meeting with federal and state disaster officials.

"Sandy was the deciding event," he said, when residents finally realized that 20 years of talk about flood mitigation via a levee or dam was unlikely to become a reality.

It will be about a month before anyone in South River gets a buyout offer. The homes will need to be appraised. The offers will be for pre-storm market value and will take into account repairs made after the Oct. 29 storm.

As they wait for the process to unfold, Pat Smith chose not to plant flowers in her yard this spring, but Deltz is building a ramp for his 14-year-old dog, and Rasmussen is rebuilding her property with the help of volunteers.
Even those who are open to a buyout speak with regret about the prospect of leaving. "This was life for us," said Bob Smith, who bought the three-bedroom house with metal ceiling tiles for $15,500 in 1967. "I had it fixed up just the way we wanted it, inside and out." Deltz said he will listen to the government's offer, but he has little incentive to move with his mortgage nearly paid off and his property taxes lower than many.

"I love where I'm at right now," he said. He missed a recent informational meeting attended by about 100 residents and was among the last to submit his buyout application. "I don't have high hopes for this," Deltz said. "My heart tells me people aren't going to get what they think they're going to get."

Eight homes purchased in South River under buyout program

Mar. 6, 2014 Staff Report . Available: mycentraljersey.com

In this Oct. 2012 file photo, South River residents get a first glimpse of damage from superstorm Sandy. / File Photo

MIDDLESEX COUNTY — Eight superstorm Sandy-damaged homes in South River have been purchased under the state buyout program, bringing the total to 44 homes in South River and Sayreville, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Bob Martin said in a news release Wednesday.

In total, 169 property owners have accepted DEP buyout offers in the two Middlesex County municipalities that sustained significant flooding when Sandy's storm surge pushed from Raritan Bay and into the South River, the release said.

The eight homes in South River, which were sold to the state by willing sellers at prestorm value, are located adjacent to the river and range in purchase price from $103,000 to $238,000.

"It's good for South River, for the community, that they're making the land open space," South River resident Tom Somers, whose home was recently purchased under the program, said in the release. "Overall, I'm very happy with the program."

"They've gotten into a rhythm, and the buyout process is going very smoothly," South River Mayor John Krenzel said. "In fact, it's going so smoothly, we have another round of people here hoping to participate in the program. The state is doing a very good job."
Once acquisitions are completed, the homes will be razed and the land will be permanently maintained by the municipalities as open space.

The DEP is continuing to expand the program in other Sandy flood-impacted communities, so far securing funding for the acquisition of a total of 424 properties in such communities as Woodbridge and East Brunswick, the release said.
The DEP also has engaged in dialogue with officials and residents in other Sandy-impacted municipalities, such as Old Bridge, Linden and another section of Woodbridge, to be considered in a next round of buyouts using a recently announced second round of federal Sandy buyout dollars, once that funding gets formal federal approval.

FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program will provide 100-percent of the funding for up to 361 buyouts in Sayreville and South River, plus up to 89 homes in the first round of Woodbridge buyouts. Additional federal funding to acquire other Sandy impacted properties, including the next round of homes in Woodbridge, will be provided through $100 million earmarked for buyouts from the $1.46 billion second round of federal Community Disaster Block Grant Disaster Recovery funds allocated to New Jersey by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the release said.

The state hopes to buyout 1,000 properties in tidal areas affected by Sandy and another 300 properties in other towns, such as Manville, that have repeatedly flooded, Martin said.
The New Jersey Sierra Club said that while this will help people in Middlesex County, South River and part of the Raritan Basin, there still are people around the state and along the shore that need to be bought out. "We are glad that the people in South River are getting the relief that they need. It is important to buy these houses out, removing residents from harm's way," said Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club. "However, there are other areas along the coast and in other parts of the New Jersey who still need buyouts.

"We need to have a comprehensive program and state funding since the Blue Acres Program is out of money. Three quarters of this money is coming from the federal government, but we need to have state program, as well. The governor's plan is good for South River, Sayreville and parts of Middlesex County, but it is not good for all of our flood-prone areas and our coast."

Homeowners interested in selling their homes through this process may contact the DEP's Blue Acres Program at 609-984-0500. Additional information about the Blue Acres Program is available at http://www.state.nj.us/dep/greenacres/blue_flood_ac.html.
For information on Sandy recovery, visit http://www.state.nj.us/dep/special/hurricane-sandy.

Giving New Jerseyans Choice In Recovery

Christie Administration "Willing Seller" Plan Provides Homeowners Options and Flexibility to Sell Sandy-Damaged Homes In Flood-Prone Areas

The Christie Administration has put forward a plan to spend ***$300 million*** in federal funds that will give homeowners the option to sell Sandy-damaged homes. This program is designed to give homeowners the ability to choose the best option for their individual situation.

The buyout program is a joint effort of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), State Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). DEP administers all Blue Acres purchases and OEM handles the financing through FEMA.

Focusing On Homes Impacted By Flooding

The plan is targeting clusters of homes or entire neighborhoods that were ravaged by Super Storm Sandy in tidal areas of New Jersey.

- The program is targeting nearly 1,000 damaged homes in tidal areas, beginning with about 350 homes in Sayreville and South River in Middlesex County that were impacted by flooding from the Raritan and South rivers, and Delaware Bay homes in Lawrence Township in Cumberland County;

- Additionally, the plan will include another 300 repetitively flood-damaged homes located in the Passaic River Basin;

- These homes will eventually be razed and the areas maintained as open space that can handle future flood waters, while keeping people and property out of harm's way.

A Swift Timeline To Help Homeowners Recover

- Property appraisals and title work will begin in June.

- The offers to willing seller homeowners will begin in July of 2013 through New Jersey's existing Blue Acres Program.

- The first closings on homes are expected to take place by Labor Day, with all closings done within one year.

Committing The Necessary Resources For The Buyout Program

A specially created buyout team at the DEP is working to process sellers' applications and get the paperwork portion of this effort done quickly.

The DEP has transferred personnel temporarily to handle the expected influx of willing sellers and to process the applications efficiently and help families get through the process as painlessly as possible.

What Interested Homeowners Need To Know

- Case managers will to reach out personally to individual homeowners by the end of May to help guide them through the buyout process.

- **Homeowners interested in selling their homes through this process also may contact the DEP's Blue Acres Program at 609-984-0500**.

CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION MAKES 272 POST-SANDY HOME BUYOUTS OFFERS IN SAYREVILLE AND SOUTH RIVER

125 OFFERS ALREADY ACCEPTED AND 22 CLOSINGS HAVE BEEN COMPLETED

NJDEP-TRENTON – The Christie Administration today announced that the state's post-Superstorm Sandy residential property buyout program has made substantial progress, with 272 buyout offers made in Sayreville and South River in Middlesex County, and closings finalized on 22 Sayreville homes, in an effort to move families out of harm's way and create natural buffers for potential future storm and flooding events.

Of the 272 buyout offers made, 125 have been accepted in both towns.

The 22 Sayreville homes, which were sold to the state by willing sellers at pre-flood market values, are located on Weber Avenue and MacArthur Avenue, areas that were severely flooded during Sandy. The buyouts, ranging in purchase price from $105,000 to $315,000, were financed by federal and state dollars.

These buyouts are part of the Administration's overall plan to acquire some 1,000 homes in areas significantly impacted by Sandy, along with another 300 repetitively flood-damaged homes in the Passaic River Basin and other locations, at a total estimated cost of $300 million. The goal is to acquire clusters of homes for buyouts.

In addition to providing fair market, pre-Sandy payouts to residents, the acquisition and demolition of these structures will eliminate the need for future disaster assistance because the land where these neighborhoods once stood will be maintained in perpetuity as open space, creating buffer areas for future flood waters.

"Many people in these Sandy affected neighborhoods told us they've had enough of dealing with flooding that has shattered their lives, and that they just want an opportunity to start again,'' said Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Martin. "We are committed to helping these people get through buyout process and helping them move on with their lives as quickly as possible.''

In addition to Sayreville and South River, which were the initial targets of the state's buyout effort, the Blue Acres Program has expanded to Woodbridge, East Brunswick, and Newark, where 119 homes in tidal areas are targeted for the next round of

purchases. In addition, the state is partnering with the federal government on 33 home buyouts in Lawrence Township in Cumberland County.

Meanwhile, local officials and residents in Linden (Union County), Old Bridge (Middlesex County), Atlantic Highlands, Neptune, and Union Beach (Monmouth County), among others, also have expressed an interest in buyouts.

Launched in April, the state's $300 million buyout program is purchasing damaged homes at pre-Sandy market values to provide residents with the financial resources needed to relocate to residences in less flood-prone areas. So far, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has provided some $55 million toward the purchase of 129 homes in Sayreville 77 in South River. Federal aid for the first round of 89 Woodbridge homes is anticipated for approval early this year.

The DEP has created a special post-Sandy Blue Acres team to work closely with willing sellers and process their buyout applications as quickly as possible. Case managers are working with individual homeowners personally to help guide them through the process.

The buyout program is a joint effort of the DEP, the State Office of Emergency Management (OEM), and FEMA. DEP administers all of the acquisitions, while OEM handles the financing through FEMA.

Established in the 1990s, the Blue Acres Program initially aimed to purchase lands in the floodways of the Delaware, Passaic, and Raritan rivers basins. That effort was later expanded to include damaged and flood-prone properties in the floodway of any state river or tributary.

Homeowners interested in selling their homes through the buyout process may contact DEP's Blue Acres Program at 609-984-0500.