

County Accepts Grant to Demolish Homes Damaged by Hurricane Florence

- [David Sinclair/Managing Editor](#)



Moore County has been awarded more than \$335,000 in federal and state funds to demolish 14 homes in the eastern part of the county below Vass that were heavily damaged or destroyed during Hurricane Florence in 2018.

County commissioners voted unanimously during a short meeting Tuesday evening to accept the grant funds — which are 75 percent federal and 25 percent state. — for what is termed an “expedited” program to acquire property in flood prone areas.

“It’s a little unsettling to call this expedited,” Commissioner Catherine Graham said.

Public Safety Director Bryan Phillips responded that the county is still working to acquire and demolish homes damaged by Hurricane Matthew from years earlier in 2016 through the normal process.

“It’s a little faster than Hurricane Matthew, but it’s not too expedited,” he said.

Phillips told commissioners that another 11 homes in those areas could be considered for acquisition through the regular process, which can take even longer. He said an award of state funding “could be coming in the near future on these homes.

In August 2019, nearly a year after what was then Tropical Storm battered the area with three days of heavy wind and rain — the county received approval from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for \$945,325 in grant funding to acquire 13 properties, mostly on Creek Bend Road, Creek View Drive and Riverview Drive. Phillips told commissioners that a 14th property was later added to the list.

The county hired a management company, using grant funding, to assist with the process of acquiring the properties, which took some time. Appraisals and surveys had to be completed before offers could be made to property owners and final price negotiated.

Now that the properties have been acquired by county, homes cannot be rebuilt on them.

Board Chairman Frank Quis noted the steep price of \$24,000 per home for the demolition. Phillips responded that the costs were calculated by FEMA and the state, and that other factors include closing off wells and septic tanks on all those properties add to the costs.

Commissioner Louis Gregory said the “bottom line” is that no local funds are involved.

As a part of the program, the county also accepted two separate grants totaling nearly \$75,000 combined to cover administrative oversight costs.

In addition, the county approved increasing the amount of the contract with Rostan Solutions, the firm hired to manage the project, by nearly \$67,000, which is also covered by grant funding.

“It is becoming clearer and clearer that it costs a lot of money to acquire and demolish homes in a floodplain,” Quis said.

Florence caused extensive flooding in these neighborhoods there were still reeling from the destruction wrought by Hurricane Matthew in 2016. More than 30 families, mainly in the Riverview Drive area in eastern Moore, were displaced by the storm, which left a trail of uninhabitable homes in its wake.

After the floodwaters from Florence receded, many residents returned to find their homes uninhabitable. The flooding undid many of the costly home repairs that followed Hurricane Matthew in 2016.

Phillips told the commissioners last September that the county was working on the acquisition of seven properties in River Bend and Riverview areas where the home was left uninhabitable or damaged beyond repair as a result of Hurricane Matthew.

Nearly two years after the storm, Phillips said the county received approval for \$660,537 in funding from FEMA and state Emergency Management to acquire six properties and \$115,000 to repair one home. He said that one homeowner later opted for acquisition after Hurricane Florence struck.

He told the commissioners that the process of acquiring the properties must be completed by July 12, 2020.

Matthew dumped 10 inches of rain on the county and nearly caused a dam breach at Woodlake, forcing the evacuation of nearly 100 homes below the troubled structure.

Also during the meeting, commissioners unanimously adopted a resolution supporting proposed improvements on a six-mile stretch of N.C. 73 from West End to the Montgomery County line to improve safety. The project includes widening the travel lanes and adding a paved shoulder.

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