

Mitigation in Grand Forks Brings Many Benefits

Release Date: April 13, 2017

The 1997 Red River flood caused widespread damage throughout the city of Grand Forks. As recovery efforts began to take shape, the community and its residents had to make some difficult choices on how to rebuild and how to coexist with the river. For many homeowners in historic neighborhoods located nearest the river, that meant accepting acquisitions and moving to higher ground.

Acquisitions were a major priority of the state when managing the 1997 Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). HMGP provides funding to disaster-stricken areas to conduct mitigation projects to minimize the impacts of future disasters. The program provides up to 75 percent federal cost share for the cost of projects, with the state and local communities responsible for the remaining funding. For the 1997 disaster, HMGP projects totaling more than \$55 million were completed statewide, with more than \$18 million of that in Grand Forks.

HMGP funding resulted in the acquisition of 350 homes in Grand Forks. As part of the agreement in conducting the acquisitions, no permanent structures can be placed on those properties. But rather than creating a hole in the community, the open space has become part of a wonderful community amenity, the Greater Grand Forks Greenway.

The Greenway serves a dual purpose of providing unimpeded area for the river to spill into during times of flooding, while also providing a shared community recreation area at all other times of the year. For example, in the former Lincoln Drive community, there is now an expanded park that includes a large disc golf course and hosts special lights and displays during the holiday season. There are also miles of walking and bicycle trails that community members can enjoy.

While the acquisitions are the most visible (or perhaps now invisible) mitigation projects, HMGP funds were also utilized for many other projects in Grand Forks and in other North Dakota communities. Some projects provided extra protection for critical infrastructure, like the city's water treatment plant, while others helped



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to improved drainage or prevent backflows into the city. All the projects have helped to make safer and more resilient communities.

Greg Wilz, Director of Homeland Security said, “North Dakota has realized 20 years of benefit from the investments made in mitigation efforts after the 1997 flood. The payback has been huge.”



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