Freeport Pecatonica Flooding

Tom Kopanski
Director of Utility Operations
Water & Sewer Division

Kirstin Hinds
Assistant to the City Manager
Manager’s Office
Freeport and its History

• Located at the Bottom of the Pecatonica Watershed
  • 115 Miles West of Chicago
  • 20 Miles South of Wisconsin

• Redline Community
  • Historically Black Neighborhood East of the Pec
  • 260 Homes 80% African-American
  • HUD Section 8 Housing in area
  • Low-income neighborhood
  • Community within a Community
  • Lack of Trust in Government

• Long History of Flooding
Flooding East of the Pecatonica

- Record clear back to 1916
- 100 year flood on Yellow Creek and Pecatonica

Historic Crests
(1) 19.76 ft on 03/16/1929
(2) 19.40 ft on 03/28/1916
(3) 18.82 ft on 02/25/1922
(4) 18.45 ft on 09/16/1914
(5) 18.36 ft on 04/06/1923
(6) 17.60 ft on 03/16/1919
(7) 17.41 ft on 04/03/1933
(8) 17.27 ft on 02/27/1915
(9) 17.26 ft on 03/18/2019 (P)
(10) 17.16 ft on 07/03/1969

Recent Crest
(1) 15.78 ft on 09/15/2019
(2) 17.26 ft on 03/18/2019 (P)
(3) 13.03 ft on 02/27/2019 (P)
(4) 16.12 ft on 02/24/2018
(5) 15.81 ft on 10/03/2018
(6) 15.39 ft on 07/26/2017
(7) 15.84 ft on 07/24/2017
History of Flood Relief

• 1994 Army Corps of Engineers Study indicating two options
  • Buy out (residents not interested)
  • Recommended large 12ft Berm ($5.5 million)

• 2012 Attempted Buyout
  • Residents not interested
  • Low Political will

• City not enforcing regulations
  • Flood regulation on books but city turning blind eye to Poverty Stricken area
  • Not red tagging buildings after flood
  • Allow Tax Trustee to sell properties
Floods since June of 2017

• Two Floods of over 15 ft in 2017
• 16.12 ft flood in February 2018
• 212 days Pecatonica was out of its banks
• 17.26ft Flood March of 2019
• 182 Days Pecatonica was out of its banks
Summer 2018 Continued Flooding

• Manhole lid popped off and let river flow into wastewater plant
Post 2018 Flood

• After Feb 2018 Flood City Leaders Changed Direction
  • Change in form of Government in May 2017

• Conducted Several Town Hall Meetings to build trust
  • Worked with Community Leaders
  • Built Trust with African-American Churches
  • Took Residents to Army Corp to Show Flood Brief

• Froze the sale of all Tax Trustee properties

• Enforced Codes

• Submitted in 2019 for Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant
  • 66 properties signed up
  • Grant denied
Steps Working with the Community

• Established East side Ad Hoc Committee to Gain Support/Buy-In and Provide Recommendations
• Held Town Hall Meetings
• Enforced Red Tagging and Rebuilding Rules
• Quitclaimed Deeds for 5 Properties
• HUD Moving and Demolishing Properties
• Elementary School Relocating
• 2 Churches Relocating
• First 17 properties already Demo’ d
Challenges

- Residents devoted to generational housing and history of neighborhood
- Community activists losing power
- Older residents uncomfortable with change
- Availability of housing
Current Actions

• $300,000 from DCEO
  • Acquisition and demolition of 24 abandoned, vacant, and condemned properties

• Almost $1 Million from IDNR
  • Bought 76 Tax Trustee properties
  • Bought major business
  • Going to continue applying as businesses show interest

• Submitted $4 Million for Pre-Disaster Grant FY20
  • City match $1 Million
  • 139 homes signed up

• Submitted $2 Million in HMGP Grant Pre-Application
  • Remaining floodway properties
Long Range Plans

• Park expansion
• Bike trail expansion
• Pollinator meadows
• Housing options through Northern Illinois Land Bank
Questions