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Flood-Prone Community Bound for Greatness

Bound Brook becomes more secure, reduces residents' insurance rates with Green Brook Flood Risk Management Project

By JoAnne Castagna, Ed.D., Public Affairs Specialist and Writer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District



A fire rescue vessel in operation in the aftermath of the flooding brought about by Hurricane Floyd in Bound Brook in September 1999. Credit: New York District, USACE.

In September 1999, before becoming Mayor of the Borough of Bound Brook, Robert Fazen woke up to the sound of helicopters hovering over his house. He soon realized they were news helicopters televising the flood damage caused by Tropical Storm Floyd.

“Downtown Bound Brook was like a warzone with flooded businesses and apartments and out-of-control fires,” said Fazen. “Police were in motor boats navigating the flooded streets rescuing residents from second story apartments, cars were floating down Main Street, and fire department boats were moored to street lamp poles, hosing down store fires.”

“The rescue continued for days and the physical recovery took months,” he said. “The mental state of Bound Brook was changed. We all wondered if our downtown would ever recover.”

RECOVERY MANAGEMENT

Today, Fazen is pleased that Bound Brook has recovered. Recently he, in collaboration with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District, and partnering agencies, completed the Bound Brook portion of the Green Brook Flood Risk Management Project.

This significant development will help protect residents from experiencing another Floyd, and will drastically reduce their flood insurance and improve Bound Brook's economy.

For the past century, Bound Brook and the surrounding region has been subjected to severe and sometimes devastating flooding resulting in \$2.5 billion (1996 dollars) in damages, widespread resident evacuations, injuries, and deaths.

“Reduced flood risk is bringing new business to the Borough of Bound Brook and increasing its economy.”

In 2000, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began construction on the Green Brook Flood Risk Management Project. The Corps is working in collaboration with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Middlesex, Somerset, and Union Counties, the Green Brook Flood Control Commission and other partnering agencies.

The project is expected to provide comprehensive flood protection to the entire Green Brook Basin that covers 65 square miles in north central New Jersey and includes 14 municipalities in Middlesex, Somerset, and Union counties.

STORM READY

The basin is a depression in the land surface that experiences flooding from the Raritan River and its tributaries, the Middle Brook, Green Brook, Bound Brook, and Stony Brook during heavy rain and storm events.

The most severe flooding has occurred

in downtown Bound Brook, within the Borough of Bound Brook in Somerset County. Besides Floyd, the basin was flooded in August 2, 1973, by a big Storm and from April 15-17, 2007, by a Nor'easter.

The project includes constructing an elaborately engineered system of levees, flood walls, closure gates, and pumping facilities throughout the Green Brook Basin. In addition, channels are being modified; buildings are being flood proofed, voluntarily bought out, or demolished; bridges are being raised and demolished; and wetland mitigation is being performed.

The project is designed to provide flood protection up to a 150-year storm event. “This is a flood whose strength and water height is predicted to occur, on average, about once in 150 years,” said Robert Greco, project manager, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District.

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Flood-Prone Community

The project as a whole is still in progress, but the Bound Brook portion is completed.

Greco explains the completed work, "To prevent water from the Raritan, Middle Brook and Green Brook Rivers from flooding the Borough of Bound Brook we constructed levees and flood-walls around the borough."

"We also constructed an interior drainage system that includes pump stations and interior drainage pipes that will convey the water on the protected side to the pump stations during a rain event," said Greco.

BUSINESS-BOOSTING BARGAIN

In July 2016 flood insurance requirements changed in the Borough of Bound Brook. According to Fazen, approximately 500 properties will no longer be required to pay flood insurance and the value of those properties along with all

the properties in the Borough of Bound Brook will increase 10% to 20%.

Reduced flood risk is bringing new business to the Borough of Bound Brook and increasing its economy. Greco said that this is evident by the presence of stable businesses moving onto Main Street in Downtown Bound Brook and the development of two major apartment complexes.

Fazen said, "Potential flooding has always inhibited outside investment and with the threat of flooding reduced, development is accelerating."

Fazen added that new development projects are also no longer burdened with state flood regulations and flood insurance costs. ❧

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Constituents' Viewpoint

Bound Brook residents like Alberto Torregroza, who has lived in the Borough of Bound Brook for 26 years and raised five children there, are satisfied with the work done in Bound Brook and the reduced flood insurance.

"This is great news that we have been waiting for years to hear," said Torregroza. "The significant reduction of our flood insurance will help us save money. The insurance may even be totally eliminated. Now we can improve the appearance of our homes and the entire town with continual maintenance and redevelopment plans."

Torregroza's family has been flooded out of their Bound Brook home several times since 1992. This included experiencing the devastation caused by Tropical Storm Floyd.

"The completion of this flood project will prevent us from seeing another major storm such as Floyd," said Torregroza. He continued, "When there are children involved in these difficult and trying situations as was the case with our family, it is an indescribable state of confusion, disbelief, and financial hardship that affects the entire family and everyone in the community."

Mayor Robert Fazen noted that the change has brought residents peace of mind, "The residents of Bound Brook are ecstatic. We always had the threat of flooding in our minds. With this project, residents feel a sense of safety."

The change is a hope for better things to come, Torregroza added. "Bound Brook is a beautiful town and we are grateful to all the parties involved for their efforts and determination to get this done," he said. "We are really going to see this community prosper, grow and improve its quality of life."

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