

Hazard Mitigation Best Practice



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A resident enjoys the natural serenity of land that was cleared following a Greenville County land acquisition.

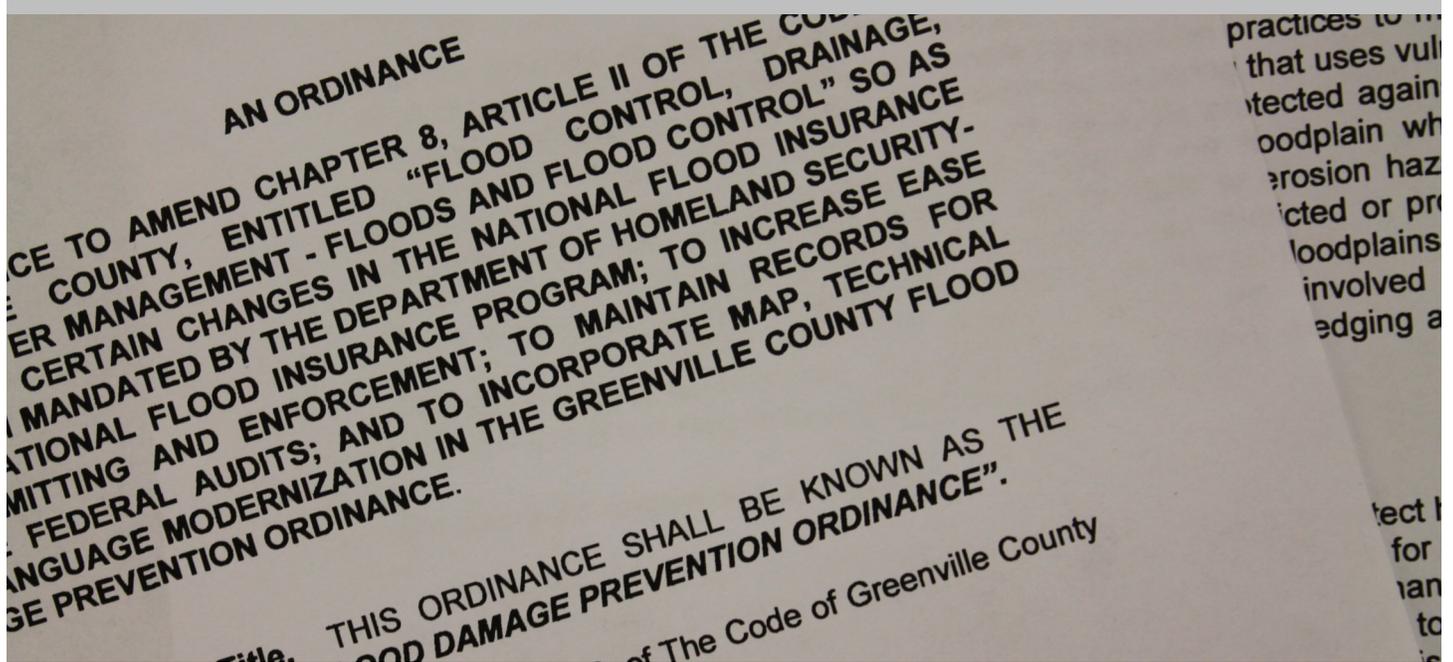
A Plan to Rise Above It All

One County's Comprehensive Plan to Combat Flood Risk

(Greenville County, SC) Surrounded by the scenic rolling foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Greenville County South Carolina is the state's most populous county. It boasts that it is the "economic engine of South Carolina", and is also known for its rich culture and tradition

While Greenville County has numerous areas that are subject to flooding, the people of Greenville have a plan to rise above it all. "We don't want the same problem we had 20 years ago," said Brian Bishop, the county's floodplain administrator. "We are looking 20 years in the future."

The county has gone all in to create a comprehensive program to combat flood risk. "It started because we wanted to get people out of harm's way," said Paula Gucker, the Greenville County Assistant Administrator for Community Planning, Development and Public Works. "Not only are buildings staying dry, but there's a public safety benefit," she said. "There were times when you couldn't even get emergency services in."



Greenville County's Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance

One way the county is ensuring the health, safety and welfare of people in the county is through code enforcement. The Greenville County Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance greatly reduced the risk of future flood damage by encouraging responsible building and making sure that new or substantially improved homes are elevated or built to reduce their risk of flooding.

“We ended up with one of the strictest (ordinances) in the country,” said Gucker.

This progressive ordinance requires new, substantially damaged, or substantially improved residential structures to have its lowest floor (including utilities) elevated four feet above the Base Flood Elevation (BFE). Nonresidential structures have the option to floodproof in lieu of meeting the elevation requirement. Properties that have a ground elevation that is below the BFE are considered to be in a Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) which has a one percent chance of flooding in any given year.

According to Bishop, people are opting for higher ground rather than paying for the additional risk of building in a floodplain. In his four years with the county, he has only permitted a handful of houses to be built in the floodplain.

Greenville County participates in the Nation Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) Community Rating System (CRS). The CRS is a voluntary incentive program that recognizes and encourages community floodplain management activities that exceed the minimum NFIP requirements. Participation in this program allows the NFIP to offer discounted flood insurance to many of the county’s residents and businesses.

“Rates are extremely good here (in Greenville County).” said Jerry Pilkington, an insurance broker and 27-year insurance industry veteran. He represents insurance firms in Greenville County, as well as other communities in several states. “If it rains, people need it (insurance). You don’t need it until



An elevated home demonstrates Greenville County's ordinance requirements (Courtesy of Greenville County)

you need it,” Pilkington continued. “I am all about asset protection.”

The county also manages and protects their floodplains. Floodplains provide for recreation and a habitat for wildlife. When it rains heavily, these areas give the water a place to go. Bishop said it’s important to “let the floodplains do what they are supposed to do.”

Another part of Greenville County’s floodplain management strategy is a voluntary property acquisition program, where homeowners can sell homes located in areas of high flood risk to the county for a fair price. The county then clears the land, using it for things like parks and gardens, but a restricted deed is recorded stating that no structures can be placed on the property. Residents provide input for what goes into the newly created space.

“At first there was some opposition to the program. Property owners assumed the county was trying to take their property from them. Now that they understand the benefits, I don’t get much pushback. It’s a benefit to everyone,” said Bishop.

A resident who often walks in one of the areas said, “They had a problem here for a while. Now it’s a nice walking area.”

The acquisition program is mostly funded through county storm water and utility fees, with additional help from FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.

A lot of people contributed to making these programs work, including the Greenville County Depart-



A bench swing awaits visitors in one of the areas cleared by land acquisition

ment of Floodplain Management, Roads and Bridges, Parks and Recreation, Property Maintenance and Facilities. The State, FEMA and the National Park Service also assisted.

“It all works well together,” said Gucker. “The county is going to be in a really good place in the future,” she added.

***For more information about
flood insurance and other topics visit:***

www.scemd.org

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