

Stephanie Smith, State Hazard Mitigation Officer at Vermont Emergency Management.

I manage our Hazard Mitigation Program – with the goal of making Vermont safer and more resilient in the face of climate change and natural hazards.

On the funding side, I manage several FEMA-funded grant programs for the state and a state grant program, the Flood Resilient Communities Fund.

I received two specific questions in advance of this testimony which I can answer fairly briefly, but I would be happy to answer any follow-up or additional questions.

- [Could the state pay for eligible FEMA benefits for residents up front and get reimbursed from FEMA later on?](#)
- The short answer is no.
- Under FEMA’s hazard mitigation programs, any activity that would be part of project implementation cannot be completed before the project has been awarded by FEMA, or the project will be ineligible.
- For context, the project types I’m talking about here which are relevant to residential properties are buyouts, elevation, relocations (next question), and mitigation reconstruction.
- One example of where there is some nuance is on buyouts, particularly relevant to the landslide buyouts following July, for homes that were destroyed. If FEMA Public Assistance money was used for demolition, to alleviate a health or safety hazard, we have a path forward – if other funding was used to demolish the structure before FEMA award, then we do not.
- Applications can include pre-award costs for things that would be required to put together an application (e.g., engineering to design a property elevation project) – but the application would need to be approved for the expenses to be reimbursed.
- [Can you receive a buy out and move your home structure out of the flood plain instead of finding a new home?](#)
- Yes, structural relocation projects are eligible under the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. Vermont has not applied for this project type in the past. The land would be purchased at the current or pre-event market value and conserved as open space.
- The grant would cover moving the structure to a new site which needs to be identified at the time of the application and outside of the FEMA-mapped Special Flood Hazard Area. The funding would pay for site preparations at the new site, including water and sewer hookups, and any remaining demolition on the original site.
- I think this project type is as possibility will depend significantly on the structure – if it is on a slab and can easily be moved, then we can likely make it work. If the building is more complicated, it could be very challenging.

Updates from when I was here in October:

Under FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), which is the funding that follows disasters in the state – I had anticipated around \$40 million; however, as the disaster numbers from July keeping coming in, it’s looking like we’ll have over \$75 million (\$34 million from Irene for context).

One other FEMA program I’ll note – a new program which was launched by FEMA late last fall, is the Flood Mitigation Assistance Swift Current program – nationally, there is \$300 million available, it is

specifically for states that have recent disaster declarations, and Vermont is eligible for \$40 million following July flooding.

This funding is specifically intended to reduce risk in the National Flood Insurance pool – so for properties that have flood insurance and are either a repetitive loss, severe repetitive loss, or were substantially damaged during the July flood, this pot can be used for buyouts, elevations, or relocation projects.

There is a deadline of May 15.

On the Flood Resilient Communities Fund – the final \$3 million we had available out of the total \$20 million pot was obligated in December to property buyouts following the July flood.