



# **City of Columbia Flood Recovery**

## **Voluntary Property Acquisition Program FAQs**

### **1. What is the Voluntary Property Acquisition (VPA) Program?**

The VPA Program is a part of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). As part of FEMA's HMGP, the state can use its FEMA funding to acquire eligible properties that were destroyed or damaged by a disaster. In this case, it provides funding for the State of South Carolina to purchase properties that were damaged or destroyed during the flooding in October 2015. The City of Columbia (City) will apply for HMGP grant funds for voluntary property acquisitions and will pursue other funding options that may apply to voluntary property acquisitions.

**THE COMPLETED VOLUNTARY INTEREST FORM IS DUE AUGUST 12, 2016 VIA MAIL OR SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY TO COCFLOODRECOVERY@COLUMBIASC.NET**

### **2. Who manages the VPA Program?**

The FEMA VPA Program is administered by the State of South Carolina in order to mitigate future hazards to the health and safety of its citizens.

### **3. Who can apply for funding through the VPA Program?**

Property Owners do not apply to FEMA or the State of South Carolina for property acquisition. The state accepts project applications only from local governments. The State sets the priorities for the HMGP funding. Local governments will work to identify areas where acquisitions make the most sense. Individuals may not apply directly to the state, but the community may apply on their behalf.

### **4. Will the City and County work together in communities with properties both in and out of the City?**

Yes – Although the City and County will be submitting separate pre-applications, they will be cross-referencing applications in areas where property acquisitions overlap.

### **5. What types of properties are included in the program?**

Both homes and businesses are eligible to be included in the VPA Program. Generally homeowners and businesses involved in an acquisition are located in Special Flood Hazard Areas or areas that have experienced repeated flooding.

### **6. What are the eligibility criteria for properties to be considered for acquisition?**

Your property must meet one (1) or more of the following minimum eligibility criteria in order to be considered for property acquisition:

1. Repetitive property loss (as defined by FEMA).
2. Structures that were substantially damaged (damage that affected 50% or more of the property) by the October 2015 floods.
3. Property in the floodplain.

**7. How much money will I get for my property through this program? What if I disagree with the price offered?**

The first step is to identify interested property owners. Exact pricing and agreement on price will occur at a later date. There is a cost share requirement when using HMGP and other grant funds which may be passed on to the property owner. Properties that are awarded through this process may be eligible to receive 75% of the pre-event value of the property in accordance with federal guidelines and policies.

**8. What if I have already begun and/or have completed the restoration process for my home? Is my property still eligible for the VPA Program?**

Yes for acquisition, however for you are not eligible for elevation assistance through this grant if you have already made repairs or elevated your home.

**9. If I have already received FEMA funding related to the flood event, will that impact the value offered through the voluntary acquisition process?**

Receiving money from FEMA does not disqualify a property from participating in this program. If the property owner has already received money through FEMA, the value of the buyout will be reduced by that amount.

**10. How long will it take to receive payment for my property?**

Property acquisition is not a simple matter and does not happen overnight. It may take months for affected South Carolina communities to agree to and submit acquisition proposals. Notification of the grant award by FEMA will be after October 1, 2016 and it may take several months after the award for the process to be completed for acquisition or elevation assistance. Acquisitions using HMGP cannot occur in advance of the funding being approved and made available.

**11. If I return the Notice of Voluntary Interest Form, does that obligate me to move forward? Does it guarantee the City will purchase my property?**

Returning the form only serves to notify the city of the voluntary interest of the property owner. It does not guarantee that the property will be purchased. It also does not obligate the property owner if he/she decides not to participate in the program.

**12. If I did not receive a form, can I obtain one and submit it?**

Yes. The forms will be located at the front desk of the City of Columbia's Utilities and Engineering Department on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of 1136 Washington Street. The form can also be downloaded from our website here: <http://www.columbiasc.net/flood>

**13. What will happen to the property once it is purchased through this program?**

The buildings and structures on the acquired properties will be demolished and the land will be cleared. The property title is deed-restricted and land must remain forever as public open green space. The City of Columbia can use it to create public parks, wildlife refuges, floodplain restoration, community gardens, or dog parks, but it cannot be sold to private individuals and the land cannot be

redeveloped. The City is evaluating several possibilities and will work with the local neighborhoods to discuss each option as it relates to the whole community.

**14. How does the voluntary property acquisition program impact my neighborhood and the City with regards to property taxes?**

Once acquired through the program, the property will be removed from the tax rolls and become a green space in perpetuity.

**15. Where can I find more information about the VPA Program?**

City of Columbia residents interested in learning more about the program, or those that are interested in having their property considered for the VPA Program should contact the City's Floodplain Division at 803-545-0005.

**16. Do I have to sell my property if it was damaged during the flood?**

No. All acquisitions through this program are voluntary. No one is forced to sell their property.

**17. What are the options for rebuilding if I choose not to sell my property?**

Property owners will be required to go through the proper permitting procedure for the demolition, elevation or repair to the structure. All flood damaged structures are required to go through proper floodplain, zoning and building permit review processes before permits will be issued. The City will require all flood damaged property owners to contact the City to report their intentions by October 5, 2016.

**18. Do I need a permit to rebuild in the floodplain?**

Yes. Please contact the City's Floodplain Division 803-545-0005.

**19. What is the floodplain and how do I know if my property is located in the floodplain?**

Floodplains are identified on the Flood Insurance Rate Map and are identified as a Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA). SFHAs are defined as the area that will be inundated by the flood event having a 1 percent chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year. The 1 percent annual chance flood is also referred to as the "base flood" or "100-year flood". If you are uncertain – please use the following link and enter your address to determine if you are located in the floodplain:  
<http://www.columbiasc.net/flood>

**20. What if I want to sell my property to a private individual or company rather than wait on the Voluntary Property Acquisition Program timeline?**

If you do not wish to participate in the Voluntary Acquisition Program and prefer to sell your property to a private individual or company you may do so. Participation in the program is not required.

**21. What if I do not want to sell the property but am still experiencing challenges associated with the flood such as mold?**

The City is aware that many residents are still experiencing mold issues. We are working to identify options for mold remediation through partner agencies such as the United Way of the Midlands. Individuals in need of flood recovery assistance are encouraged to call the United Way's referral number 211 to for information on flood recovery assistance programs.