



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 18, 2015

Contact: Bob Considine (609) 984-1795
Lawrence Hajna (609) 984-1795

FIRST WOODBRIDGE HOMES DEMOLISHED IN DEP'S BLUE ACRES PROGRAM
*424 OFFERS ACCEPTED AND 280 CLOSINGS IN CONTINUING EFFORT TO MOVE
HOMES FROM REPEATEDLY FLOODED AREAS*

(15/P25) TRENTON – The first Woodbridge demolitions in the post-Sandy Blue Acres residential property buyout program are occurring this week, marking another major milestone in the state's continuing efforts to move homeowners out of harm's way, the Department of Environmental Protection announced today.

Demolitions in the township started last week when homes on Watson Avenue and Crampton Avenue, all of which are adjacent to the Heards Brook, were razed. Today, a repeatedly flood-damaged home at nearby 560 Heidelberg Avenue was taken down. Additional demolitions will be scheduled in the township over the next several months.

Sayreville, South River, East Brunswick and Woodbridge were the first municipalities approved by the DEP's Blue Acres program to purchase Sandy-damaged dwellings in flood-prone areas from willing sellers at pre-storm values, with the properties to be returned to open space.

"These first demolitions in Woodbridge are another important stage in our ongoing commitment to move families and property out of harm's way through the Superstorm Sandy Blue Acres Buyout Program," said DEP Deputy Commissioner David Glass. "Getting these properties to serve as natural buffers for future flood events, while giving homeowners a chance at a fresh start, remain our goals as we continue to expand the program."

So far, 133 property owners have accepted DEP buyout offers in Woodbridge. The DEP has closed on 88 of those homes, including those being demolished this week.

"Immediately following the devastation of Superstorm Sandy, Woodbridge Township went to work to assist homeowners in the hardest hit properties in our flood zone," said Woodbridge Mayor John E. McCormac. "Working with Governor Chris Christie, the DEP's Blue Acres Program, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), we targeted 182 properties for buyouts. Today, while seeing the demolition of the structures is bittersweet, the residents who took the buyout are out of harm's way and we are able to return the land to open space."

The home demolished today was owned by Monique Coleman for seven years. The two-story A-frame home, which was purchased by the state for \$208,703, had been damaged by a nor'easter in 2010, Hurricane Irene in 2011 and Superstorm Sandy in 2012.

"The Sandy Blue Acres program provided a way out of the flood zone, and the draining cycle of flood damage, loss, and recovery that my family experienced," Coleman said. "I am happy to have closed that chapter in my life before experiencing anymore major flooding events. I couldn't be more thankful for participating in the Sandy Blue Acres buyout program. It was the

best option for my family. We continue to recover from the losses that we experienced, but it feels very good to be safely resettled on higher ground."

There have been an additional 147 demolitions in Sayreville and South River, two of the Middlesex County municipalities that sustained significant flooding when Sandy's storm surge pushed from Raritan Bay and into the South River. The DEP has closed on 187 homes in those two towns.

Overall, 280 homes have been closed on in the post-Sandy Blue Acres program, including the first in Lawrence Township (Cumberland County) and four in East Brunswick. The state has made 620 buyout offers in 10 municipalities, thus far, with 424 homeowners accepting those offers.

Blue Acres also expects to begin making offers in Old Bridge and Linden in early spring and for closings to take place in Manville, Newark and Pompton Lakes within the coming months. In addition, the DEP is working with officials and residents in other municipalities that are being considered for future rounds of buyouts.

Launched by the Christie Administration in the spring of 2013, the Sandy Blue Acres Program aims to purchase some 1,300 damaged homes at pre-Sandy market values, providing residents with financial resources needed to relocate.

Under the program, structures are demolished and the properties converted to open space that provides natural protections for communities against future severe weather events. DEP personnel work closely with sellers and process their applications as quickly as possible. Case managers guide homeowners through the acquisition process.

The program has been a key part of the Christie Administration's efforts to make New Jersey more resilient in the face of future storms and flooding. In addition to buyouts, the state's comprehensive plan also includes working with the Army Corps of Engineers on a \$1 billion comprehensive coastal protection system that includes enhanced beaches and dunes to better protect coastal communities, new elevation standards in flood zones, programs to assist homeowners with the cost of elevations, and \$1.2 billion in potential financing for the hardening of water and wastewater infrastructure.

###