

An Update on Irene Recovery Work for Mobile Home Park Residents

April 2012

Mobile Home Parks Among Hardest Hit

Within the first two weeks of Tropical Storm Irene striking Vermont, it became clear that mobile home park residents would be one of the priorities of the recovery effort.

Residents in these parks, which are often situated in low-lying areas, suffered disproportionate impact from the storm. Four hundred thirty-eight mobile homes were eligible for FEMA assistance and 129 homes required complete demolition and removal.

Sustaining and supporting mobile home communities plays an important part in keeping Vermont healthy and vital. A 2007-09 survey of mobile home park residents conducted by the Department of Community Development & Applied Economics at the University of Vermont showed that almost 85% were low-income; over 40% of residents were “very low-income” or “extremely low-income.” Mobile home park residents live in well-established neighborhoods; 87 percent of residents own their home and 70% were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their home. Mobile home parks provide vital affordable housing in a way that supports long-term community engagement. Indeed, without mobile home parks it is likely that an entire socio-economic class of Vermonters would be unable to find or maintain adequate housing.

Addressing The Need In The Wake Of The Storm

Among the most pressing needs for mobile home park residents was finding a way to remove destroyed homes without drawing on their already limited resources.



Photo Credit: Lt. Governor Scott's Office

With support from the Vermont Workers' Center, residents quickly organized themselves, meeting with disaster assistance officials from FEMA and the State of Vermont and connecting with advocacy organizations and the Community Foundation.

The Foundation partnered with Lt. Governor Phil Scott, Vermont Secretary of Commerce

Lawrence Miller, the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity's (CVOEO) Mobile Home Project, the Association of General Contractors, and the Vermont Long Term Disaster Recovery Group to find a solution to this challenge. Everyone had a role to play.

Lt. Governor Scott, who is a contractor himself, worked with colleagues to negotiate pricing for collective removal of the destroyed mobile homes, greatly reducing the overall cost and taking the burden off individual residents to negotiate and pay for removal services. CVOEO's Mobile Home Project agreed to provide overall coordination. And the Association of General Contractors managed day-to-day operations.

Initial estimates indicated that the average cost to remove a mobile home from an affected park through this effort would be \$1,500—an amount that was still out of reach for many who had lost their homes. So the Community Foundation established the Mobile Home Project Fund to help collect and deploy contributions to CVOEO's Mobile Home Project and, along with the other partners, mobilized philanthropic connections to support recovery for mobile home park residents.

The first gift of \$25,000 from Aubuchon Hardware was announced by Lt. Governor Scott on October 3



Mobile home park residents whose homes were affected by Tropical Storm Irene.

and was followed by a \$50,000 gift from the band Phish's WaterWheel Fund for Vermont Flood Recovery at the Community Foundation. With additional major contributions from businesses, family foundations, and others to CVOEO's Mobile Home Project, a total of \$310,803 was raised to support this effort.

Removal More Expensive Than Anticipated

As it turned out, the actual costs of the project were greater than the initial estimates. Shortly after beginning the deconstruction process, asbestos was discovered in several of the mobile homes. This led to each mobile home being individually tested and, if necessary, mitigated.

In the end, 68 mobile homes were removed by the project team at a total cost of \$227,645. Twelve mobile homes required asbestos abatement. The average actual cost of each removal was \$3,348, over twice the original estimate, though still well below the cost individual homeowners would have paid on their own. Thanks to the generosity of donors, no mobile home resident participating in the project had to pay out-of-pocket expenses for the demolition or removal of their home.

Helping Additional Residents

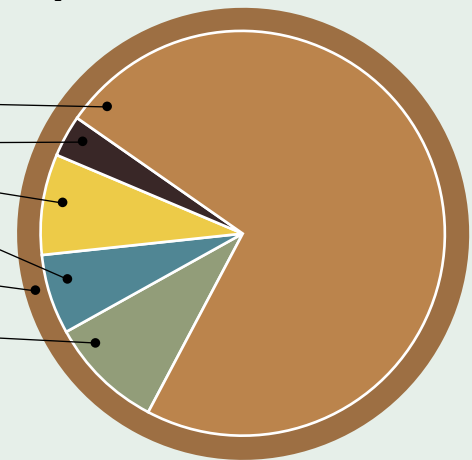
Several mobile home park residents could not take advantage of the removal program for a variety of reasons. Because many of these homeowners incurred significant costs in removing their homes, the partners in the effort decided to offer reimbursement of up to \$1,500 per home to qualifying homeowners. After significant outreach, 18 such grants were awarded to homeowners in five parks around the state.

Up to four mobile home owners in these parks were unable to participate in the program because they had not yet heard whether they were eligible for FEMA assistance at the time of the scheduled demolition. The fund is holding \$20,000 in reserve to cover the costs of the demolition and removal of these homes.

The fund's remaining balance is approximately \$28,000. The Foundation is consulting with its partners and mobile home residents on how to best utilize these funds for ongoing recovery efforts. In keeping with the spirit in which the funds were given, 100% of the remaining balance will support mobile home park residents.

Mobile Home Project Expense Report

Removal of 68 Mobile Homes	\$227,645
Project Management by CVOEO*	\$10,000
Mini-Grants to 18 Mobile Home Residents	\$25,296
Four additional late removals (Estimated)	\$20,000
Total Expenses.	\$282,941
Remainder, to support Mobile Home Residents	\$ 27,862



* This expense was funded by a single donation from a fund at the Vermont Community Foundation

To learn more about CVOEO's Mobile Home Program and Irene-related funds at the Community Foundation, visit vtfloodresponse.org. You can also contact the Foundation's Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup at 802-388-3355 ext. 295.