

## Terms

**Base Flood or 100-year Flood:** These terms are used interchangeably to mean a flood having a 1-percent probability of being equaled or exceeded in any given year.

**Benefit-Cost Analysis (BCA):** A FEMA-approved method for determining the potential positive effects of a mitigation measure and comparing them to the cost of the measure. The BCA can be used to compare alternative projects to determine the best alternative from a fiscal standpoint.

**Elevation Certificate (EC):** A certificate developed by FEMA that verifies the elevation data of a structure on a given property relative to the ground level. It can also be used by the property owner to obtain flood insurance. The EC form must be completed by a registered professional engineer or land surveyor licensed in the state of Washington.

**Floodway:** The floodway, the floodway fringe and the density fringe are the three sections that make up the county's floodplain. The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) defines floodways as the channel of a river or other watercourse and adjacent land areas that must be reserved in order to discharge the base flood without cumulatively increasing the water surface elevation more than one foot.

**Floodway Fringe:** That portion of a floodplain which is inundated by floodwaters but is not within a defined floodway. Floodway fringes serve as temporary storage areas for floodwaters. (Snohomish County Code 30.44.630)

**Substantial Damage:** A structure is considered "substantially damaged" if the market value of the repairs or improvements needed to restore it is greater than 50 percent of its original market value. See Snohomish County Code (SCC) 30.52F.172 for a full definition.

**Substantial Improvement:** Any reconstruction, rehabilitation, addition, or other improvement of a building, the cost of which equals or exceeds 50 percent of the market value of the building before the "start of construction" of the improvement. Substantial improvement includes buildings that have incurred "substantial damage," regardless of the actual repair work performed. See SCC 30.91S.750 for a full definition.

**Repetitive Loss Structure:** An NFIP-insured structure that has had at least two paid flood losses of more than \$1,000 each in any 10-year period since 1978.

**Severe Repetitive Loss (SRL) Structure:** A residential property that is covered under an NFIP flood insurance policy and: (1) has at least four NFIP claim payments (including building and contents) over \$5,000 each, and the cumulative amount of such claims payments exceeds \$20,000; or (2) for which at least two separate claims payments (building payments only) have been made with the cumulative amount of the building portion of such claims exceeding the market value of the building. In both cases, at least two of the referenced claims must have occurred within any ten-year period, and must be greater than 10 days apart.

**i** For information on grant opportunities:  
David Wilson, P.E., CFM  
Snohomish County Public Works  
Surface Water Management  
425-262-2585  
david.wilson@snoco.org

**i** For information on permit requirements:  
Snohomish County Planning & Dev. Services  
425-388-3311

**Title VI and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Information:** It is Snohomish County's policy to assure that no person shall on the grounds of race, color, national origin, or sex, as provided by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be discriminated against under any County sponsored program or activity. For questions regarding Snohomish County Public Works' Title VI Program, or for interpreter or translation services for non-English speakers, or otherwise making materials available in an alternate format, contact the Department Title VI Coordinator via email at spw-titlevi@snoco.org or phone 425-388-6660. Hearing/speech impaired may call 711.

**Información sobre el Título VI y sobre la Ley de Americanos con Discapacidades (ADA por sus siglas en inglés):** Es la política del Condado de Snohomish asegurar que ninguna persona sea excluida de participar, se le nieguen beneficios o se le discrimine de alguna otra manera en cualquier programa o actividad patrocinada por el Condado de Snohomish en razón de raza, color, país de origen o género, conforme al Título VI de la Enmienda a la Ley de Derechos Civiles de 1964. Comuníquese con el Department Title VI Coordinator (Coordinador del Título VI del Departamento) al correo electrónico spw-titlevi@snoco.org, o al teléfono 425-388-6660 si tiene preguntas referentes al Snohomish County Public Works' Title VI Program (Programa del Título VI de Obras Publicas del Condado de Snohomish), o para servicios de interpretación o traducción para los no angloparlantes, o para pedir que los materiales se hagan disponibles en un formato alternativo. Los que tienen necesidades comunicativas especiales pueden llamar al 711.

SWM.12.3.B.0118



## Voluntary Floodplain Home Buyout Program

### Guidelines for Property Owners

This brochure is intended to provide information on Snohomish County's Voluntary Floodplain Home Buyout Program, which is administered by Snohomish County Public Works Surface Water Management and funded through Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grants.

The Voluntary Floodplain Home Buyout Program can provide owners of homes located in the floodway or subject to severe damage from flooding or bank erosion with the opportunity to sell their property to the county at its fair market value as established by a qualified appraiser. The house is then demolished by the county and the floodplain property is returned to open space in perpetuity.

Buyouts are an effective tool for long-term flood damage reduction. For homes that were built prior to flood hazard building regulations or built in areas where the adjacent river channel has undergone significant changes, buyouts permanently reduce risks to life and property from future significant flood events.

For local taxpayers, buyouts reduce future public costs for evacuation, emergency shelter, and debris removal services. In addition, buyouts provide the added benefits of improving flood storage and conveyance, enhancing habitat for fish and wildlife and supporting water quality.

Similar to the Voluntary Floodplain Home Elevation Program,<sup>1</sup> all buyouts are strictly voluntary and typically take two to three years from initiation to completion. Please see inside for the full list of steps in the process.

<sup>1</sup> Visit [www.snoco.org](http://www.snoco.org) and search "Voluntary Floodplain Home Elevation Program."

# Program Requirements

## Eligible Properties

Eligible properties are those that meet each of the following criteria:

- The home has been subject to repetitive flood damage, and meets the FEMA definition of a repetitive loss or severe repetitive loss property.
- The home is in the floodway or in a high-risk erosion area.
- The home has been substantially damaged.<sup>2</sup> Substantially damaged homes in the floodway pose a risk to both residents and to the responding agencies. If they can be rebuilt, they must be rebuilt to meet current flood hazard development regulations. In some cases these homes cannot be rebuilt.
- Home elevation is not a practical alternative to prevent future flood losses.
- The homeowner is (1) willing to participate in the program, (2) willing to accept the fair market value of the property, as established by a qualified appraiser, and (3) able to contribute 10–25 percent of appraised value of the home to meet the cost share required by the grant.
- The buyout must meet FEMA's Benefit Cost criteria for a return on investment and fit within the county's budget for flood reduction projects.

## Availability of Federal Funding Assistance

FEMA provides financial assistance on an annual basis for the purchase of eligible at-risk homes through the Mitigation Grant Assistance Program. The federal government is willing to fund these programs because repetitive loss properties can pose an ongoing risk to lives and costs to the community. FEMA will pay 75 percent of the eligible costs for the acquisition of repetitive loss properties, if the property has flood insurance and meets FEMA's criteria for the number and size of claims and cost-effectiveness. However, FEMA will pay 100 percent of the eligible costs to fund the acquisition or relocation of severe repetitive loss structures, even when they do not meet cost effective requirements, since reducing the number of severe repetitive loss properties is one of FEMA's priorities.

In addition, substantially damaged and substantially improved properties may qualify for assistance through the Increased Cost of Compliance (ICC) insurance coverage. ICC coverage is included in flood insurance policies, and can provide reimbursement of up to \$30,000 to cover compliance with local regulations. For more information, please see [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov), and search "ICC."

## Washington State's Role

The Washington State Department of the Military, Emergency Management Division (WA EMD) administers FEMA funds awarded to communities within the State of Washington. This agency reviews grant applications for eligibility, and contracts with FEMA and the communities within the state to administer funding to projects and activities identified in the state and local Natural Hazard Mitigation/ Recovery plans. For Snohomish County, home elevations, property acquisitions, and home relocations are all eligible activities to reduce future flood losses or damage from other natural hazards.

## Snohomish County's Role

Snohomish County Public Works Surface Water Management Division (SWM) staff prepares grant applications on behalf of willing homeowners with qualified projects that provide a long-term solution to flooding. Funding is typically sought through the

FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Assistance Programs. SWM prioritizes applications by the willingness of the homeowner and the highest return on investment for FEMA and Washington State.

SWM submits top-ranking applications to WA EMD for screening and state-level prioritization. WA EMD forwards eligible applications to FEMA on an annual basis.

If an application is successful and Snohomish County is awarded grant funding for the proposed project, SWM's role is to manage the grant and be a conduit of funds between the private homeowner and the state and federal grant-funding agencies.

## Homeowner's Role

If the county presents a purchase offer for a buyout, the owners may accept or reject the offer with no further obligation. Homeowners are responsible for maintenance, utilities, and any other costs of ownership including insurance and mortgage payments during the buyout process.

# Steps in the Buyout Process

A typical voluntary home buyout includes the following steps, which on average, occur over a period of 36 months:

Consultation	
Step 1	The homeowner contacts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning and Development Services (PDS) staff to learn which actions (home elevation and/or relocation, flood proofing, etc.) may be practical and allowed on the site, and</li> <li>• SWM staff to discuss mitigation options for his/her home that has repeatedly suffered flood damages or lost land area due to severe erosion.</li> </ul>
Step 2	SWM staff meets with the homeowner to discuss mitigation options and provide program literature. If the homeowner is interested, after reviewing the requirements SWM staff conducts a site visit.
Step 3	The homeowner provides an Elevation Certificate for use in the benefit cost analysis (BCA) screening process and signs an agreement affirming that they are willing and eligible to participate.
Step 4	SWM staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops a draft cost estimate using the Snohomish County Assessors valuations for the property,</li> <li>• Completes a BCA to determine if the project is cost beneficial and meets FEMA's criteria for return on investment, and</li> <li>• Selects the highest priority projects with willing property owners to submit to the state for further review.</li> </ul>
Step 5	If the homeowner is willing and able to proceed, the project meets BCA requirements and is a high-priority (relative to other proposed projects), SWM staff will submit a Letter of Intent (LOI/Grant Application) to WA EMD. The LOI is submitted on behalf of the homeowner and the proposed project to request funding for that project.  Note: The LOI does not commit the homeowner to selling their home. It is simply an initial step in competing with the projects from other jurisdictions for grant funding.

Funding Assistance	
Step 6	If the project is awarded grant funding, Snohomish County will receive a contract between nine and 24 months after submitting the grant application. This contract is reviewed by the county's Prosecuting Attorney, the County Executive and the County Council. If approved, WA EMD and Snohomish County SWM will begin working together to complete the terms of the contract.
Project Scoping	
Step 7	The county is required to provide an opportunity for public comment, which must be accomplished through a public notice published in the Everett Herald newspaper. A public meeting is optional.
Step 8	Snohomish County Public Works Environmental Services staff will visit the site and complete a critical areas site plan and a demolition permit. The Public Works Native Plant Steward will also review the property for invasive plants, and develop a plan for vegetation management and the establishment of native plants to be completed after the home is removed.
Step 9	After the state contract has been awarded, Snohomish County Public Works Real Estate Division provides an appraisal and risk assessment to determine if there are any liabilities associated with the property, such as contaminated soils. The purpose of the appraisal is to generate an estimate of value.
Step 10	If the property passes the appraisal/valuation and environmental risk assessment evaluations, and the state has grant funding available, the homeowner is presented with a purchase offer based on the appraisal.
Owner Agreement	
Step 11	If the owner willingly accepts the purchase offer, a settlement date will be scheduled for the owners to come into the county offices and sign the paperwork, which includes a statement of voluntary participation. A moving date is established for the owners at this point.  As part of the closing process, all debts are paid off, the title is cleared on the property, the owners receive payment and sign the statutory warranty deed and the open space deed restriction.
County Ownership/Transfer to Open Space	
Step 12	Within ninety days from closing (step 11), the septic and water system are decommissioned and the home is demolished. Site stabilization measures, such as erosion control or fencing, are installed.
Step 13	From this point on, the site is managed by the SWM property management group under a specific management plan that is restricted by deed to forestry, agriculture, parks or open space preservation. Over the next season, invasive plants are treated for removal. Native plants are installed in the disturbed areas to prevent the spread of invasive plants and to provide natural and beneficial floodplain functions.  In some cases, the land may be transferred for property management purposes to a qualified land trust or another acceptable government entity; but the restriction on its use remains with the land.

<sup>2</sup> See definition of substantial damage under "Terms."