

Flood Recovery Task Force, Inc. Flood Grant Report,
1973 October 1st

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TA GRANT PROJECT
NO. 01-6-09588-70

FLOOD RECOVERY TASK FORCE, INC. REPORT TO EDA

Period of September 5 - December 25

Immediately after the flood, the Task Force was instrumental in focusing the Federal and State governments' attention on the dimensions of the disaster, and on the inadequacy of existing legislation to deal with it effectively. It urged both the President and the Congress to immediately enact legislation which would create the necessary vehicles for community rehabilitation.

Subsequently, the Task Force met several times with presidential representatives and congressional leaders and with the Governor and Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania to urge creation of a retroactive co-insurance program in which the Federal Government, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and flood victims would participate jointly.

The Task Force convened conferences between representatives of the Federal agencies, the Federal Regional Council, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for the purpose of coordinating their activities and the planning and development efforts of the fragmented local governments. Specifically, it 1) arranged for the establishment of a Federal Regional Council office in Wilkes-Barre, 2) located quarters for its operation, 3) was instrumental in the designation of the Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania as the "lead agency" to collaborate with the Task Force in reviewing and coordinating the planning and development programs of local governments.

Throughout the report period, the Task Force often found it necessary to act outside the future-oriented areas defined in the Special Terms and Conditions of its EDA grant in order to deal with urgent, immediate problems.

A disagreement between city officials and building contractors that was obstructing implementation of the Mini-Repair Program in Wilkes-Barre was an example of such problems, and strained relations between local unions and contractors brought in from outside the Valley to help install mobile home emergency housing was another. In both of these cases, and in others like them, the Task Force acted to clarify the issues involved and to establish the contacts needed to resolve the particular problem.

Specific flood-related complaints from citizen groups, both formal and informal, indicated a need for liason between the groups and the governmental agencies equipped either to remove the particular difficulty or to ease the burden it imposed. The Task Force arranged appropriate meetings - for example, between businessmen plagued by an acute post-flood labor shortage and representatives of the Department of Labor and Bureau of Employment Security; and between citizens desiring waiver of normal construction codes and municipal officials.

On other citizen complaints, the Task Force saw a need for more direct action. Accordingly, it made such suggestions to governmental agencies as: that deadlines for use of campers, for applications for SBA loans, and for decisions on

demolition of damaged homes be extended; that homeowners be assisted in winterizing flood damaged homes slated for rehabilitation in the spring; that SBA's loan procedures more accurately reflect the agency's designation as the preferred vehicle for providing relief to flood victims; and that restoration of dikes to their pre-flood condition be speeded up.

In the case of other "brush-fire" flood-related problems, the Task Force acted to dispel confusion, or to advocate a particular solution. For instance, it cooperated with SBA in compiling and publishing commonly asked questions about SBA loans and their answers; it brought the needs for assistance of flood damaged private institutions to the attention of appropriate governmental agencies; and it made public statements in support of extension of the Interim Assistance Program to all of the Valley's flood-stricken areas.

Task Force Activities in Areas Defined in the Special Terms and Conditions of its EDA Grant

1) Develop a program in the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania to provide citizen input and citizen leadership for the future planning and redevelopment of the flood-stricken communities and provide assistance to these communities in ascertaining their future rehabilitation needs.

Since the information on which to base judgments about the Valley's redevelopment and rehabilitation needs was not available during most of the period covered by this report, the Task Force was able to act in the area outlined above only in the following ways:

1. initiation of efforts to reconstitute the Susquehanna River Basin Association
2. preliminary review by Task Force Planning and Development Committee of EDC Overall Regional Program
3. support of proposal made by Representative Flood for co-insurance as a vehicle for providing government assistance to victims of disaster

2) Coordinate the efforts of each of the municipalities in the flood-stricken area of the Wyoming Valley in their planning and development for the rehabilitation and future of the area.

Because the Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority's unwillingness to comply with the EPA requirement of secondary treatment of sewage was holding up release of all redevelopment funds for the area, the Task Force concentrated much of its attention during the report period on finding a solution to this problem. By bringing representatives of the Federal and State governments and the Sanitary Authority together, it helped to establish understanding by each group of the stands taken by the others. When a member of the Sanitary Authority proposed that the Authority pass a compromise resolution, the Task Force supported the proposal.

Mindful of the failure of pre-flood efforts to effect consolidation of the Valley's many municipal governments, the Task Force deliberately took an oblique approach to the task of coordinating their recovery plans. Its first step in this direction was to sponsor an informal meeting of municipal officials for the purpose of discussing mutual problems relating to the flood. Positive response to this meeting led to plans to hold others like it on a regular basis; the next, at which representatives of the consulting firm preparing the Valley's Sketch Plan described their work, was held on December 21st.

Other Task Force activities in this area were: discussions between Task Force Staff and individual municipal officials on use of EDA grant monies in such a way as to ensure recovery and serve as a basis for future progress; Task Force Staff consultation with EDA and other "umbrella" agencies on monitoring of Technical Assistance grants to municipal governments; consultation with local officials and planning agencies on guidelines for overall coordination of re-development and recovery programs.

- 3) Provide assistance to political subdivisions in the Wyoming Valley, Pennsylvania to solve problems relating to: Government structure, the development of efficient government and maximum coordinated services; the erosion of the tax base as a result of the Hurricane Agnes flood.
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During the report period Task Force activities in this area took the form of:

1. Cooperation with EDA in emphasizing to local officials the availability and value to municipalities of the personnel training, management, and review services offered by local "umbrella" organizations (Pennsylvania Economy League, Institute of Regional Affairs, Economic Development Council, and Flood Recovery Task Force), and in urging coordination of individual municipal recovery programs.
2. Assistance to municipalities in understanding their options on flood insurance, bank loans, and urban renewal.
3. Consultation with County Commissioners, Civil Defense, the Governor's Justice Commission, Institute of Regional Affairs, and Pennsylvania Economy League on establishment of a comprehensive communications network.
4. Assistance to HUD in providing training courses for police and fire protection personnel in mobile home parks.
5. Efforts to promote public acceptance of "home rule".
6. Discussion with Commonwealth officials on possible state legislation beneficial to flood victims.

- 4) Aid in expediting reconstruction and construction of highways, bridges, cross-valley expressway, and mass transportation systems for Wyoming Valley.
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Loss of one of the two major bridges connecting Wilkes-Barre with the West Side of the Susquehanna River and flood damage to many of the Valley's roads and

streets resulted in acute traffic congestion in the city and on its approaches. Accordingly, the Task Force acted quickly in the interest of securing prompt repairs to the washed-out North Street Bridge, "immediate action" improvements in traffic patterns, and retention of substantial increases in bus ridership due to OEP-funded free service.

Working closely with representatives of DOT and PennDOT, the Task Force was instrumental in getting repairs to the North Street Bridge started during the early part of September and in securing commitments from the Federal and State governments, subsequently fulfilled, to complete the repairs by the middle of January 1973. Also it cooperated with Federal DOT and PennDOT to secure rapid implementation of emergency traffic patterns and signalization.

OEP funding of free bus transportation after the flood resulted in a substantial increase in bus ridership. With a view to retaining as much of this increase as possible, the Task Force gained the Luzerne County Commissioners' support for formation of a Luzerne County Transportation Authority, formed the Authority, and got commitments from federal and state agencies amounting to 100% financing of a 21-month mass transit Demonstration Project and a Capital Improvement Program. Next, it initiated negotiations with local bus companies for purchase of service agreements and helped the Authority find and hire an executive director.

Serious disruption of communication between Wilkes-Barre and the West Side communities due to the flood loss of the North Street Bridge heavily underlined the Valley's need for a highway project that was in the planning stage before the flood, the North Cross Valley Expressway. Had the Expressway been in existence on June 23rd, the emergency situation brought on by the flood would have been substantially less severe; its rapid construction would speed the Valley's recovery from the flood. For these reasons the Task Force cooperated with Federal DOT and PennDOT to obtain emergency, flood-related status for the Expressway. To support its request it worked with EDC to prepare a statement justifying emergency status for the project.

5) Develop additional resources, including financial, technical assistance and others, to aid flood stricken victims of Hurricane Agnes. In providing such technical assistance, the Grantee shall place first priority on those problems whose elimination will result in immediate or near-term restoration of jobs. All work is to be coordinated with the Federal disaster recovery programs and related efforts, public and private.

The Task Force's activities in this area included:

1. Establishment of contact between representatives of the Federal Regional Council and local social service agencies with a view to providing coordinated human services to residents of mobile home parks.
2. Expediting of utility hook-ups for mobile home parks.
3. Successful efforts to assure availability of emergency housing in unoccupied mobile homes in case of winter-caused crises such as fires, furnace failures, and freezing of pipes.
4. Action to expedite SBA loans to local businessmen.

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5. Merger of the Task Force's Committee on Families, Health, and the Aging (later named Committee on Human Services) with the Federal Regional Council's Total Living Environment Task Force for the purpose of coordinating and expediting delivery of social services to residents of mobile home parks.
6. Public support for Representative Dan Flood's proposal for national disaster insurance.
7. Consultation with State and Federal officials on:
 - a. potential health problems in mobile home parks
 - b. Valley's critical post-flood nursing home situation
8. Consultation with representatives of HUD, FRC, and Penn State. Extension Service on services Penn State specialists might offer residents of mobile home parks.
9. Assistance in:
 - a. resolving difficulties between SBA and Veterans Administration about loans to veterans
 - b. instituting "wrap-around" financing of old and post-flood mortgages.
10. Establishment of contacts between employers hurt by post-flood shortage of labor and representatives of Department of Labor and Bureau of Employment Security.
11. Support for government-funded "winterizing" of flood-damaged homes whose owners have decided to delay repairing them until spring.
12. Success in securing financing for and establishing a "single-number" Wilkes-Barre Information Service to put flood victims beset by a multiplicity of problems in quick contact with the social service agencies best equipped to help them.
13. Successful action to have local loan servicing agencies designated as appropriate to handle SBA loans.
14. Recommendation to government officials on basis of study of health care needs of residents of mobile home parks to assign public health nurses to a number of parks for a period of 4-6 weeks. (this recommendation was subsequently acted on)
15. Dissemination of advice from Biloxi-Gulfport victims of Hurricane Camille given at time of summer visit to Wyoming Valley by delegation from Mississippi and during October visit to Biloxi-Gulfport region by delegation from Wyoming Valley.
16. Exploration by Task Force Committee on Human Services of possible solutions to "crisis" shortage of nursing home beds.
17. Formation of committee to document serious shortage of low-income housing, based on indication by HUD that such documentation would lead to action to alleviate the situation.
18. Formation of and representation on Executive Committee representing Federal and State Agencies and local agencies for purpose of reviewing and coordinating delivery of human services to flood victims.
19. Co-sponsorship with HEW of meeting of business leaders to discuss impact of flood on the elderly of the flood-affected areas.

NOTE: None of the Task Force activities have had a direct impact on the environment.

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Problems Encountered and Forecast for Next Reporting Period

The major problem has been one of communication between the Federal, State, and local agencies involved in the recovery effort.

The Task Force's forecast for the next reporting period is continuation of existing programs with emphasis on activities within the five areas of responsibility outlined in the Special Terms and Conditions of the grant.

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JAN 12 1973

WILKES COLLEGE

Flood Disaster
10/11/73

FLOOD GRANT REPORT

1. Approved on Original Damage Survey Report \$15,242,688
Supplemental Reports of Flood Damage \$ 395,589
(Approval Pending)
Total Originally Approved and Pending Approval \$15,638,277
2. Advance Funds Requested and Received to Date \$ 7,000,000
Advance Funds Requested and Not Yet Received \$ 2,000,000
Total Advance Funds Received and Requested \$ 9,000,000
3. History of Flood Loss Documentation
 - a) May 31, 1971 College Inventory
 - b) Post Flood Damage Assessment and Documentation
 - c) OEP Authorizations and Correspondence
 - d) Various Meetings With OEP and HEW Concerning Analysis and Appeal on Flood Damage
 - e) Contractor's Records
 - f) Preparation for Audit Review
4. Buildings For Which Grants-In-Lieu Are Being Requested
5. HEW Resurvey of Buildings
6. Eligibilities and Upgrading
7. Officials We Deal With:
 - a) OEP
 - 1) Mr. Francis X. Carney - Coordinating Officer, Philadelphia
 - 2) Mr. Kevin Nelson - Local Disaster Coordinator

- b) HEW (Region III, Philadelphia)
 - 1) Mr. O. Eugene Trivits - Disaster Coordinator
 - 2) Mr. Paul Mason - Higher Education Program Director
 - 3) Mr. C. D. Hall - Higher Education Program Officer
 - 4) Mr. Owen Johnson - Chief Engineer
 - 5) Mr. Phil Paul - Local Engineer (Located in Wilkes-Barre)
- c) Pennsylvania Department of Education
 - 1) Mr. Jack Priest

