

Case Concentration: With a population of 1.2 million, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, is the largest metropolitan area in the Carolinas, and the second fastest-growing metropolitan area in the Nation. During its 30 years of participation in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), the area has experienced increased concerns about urbanization, tropical storms/hurricanes, severe flooding, and storm-water management. To help mitigate against damages caused by flooding, the Mecklenburg County Storm Water Services entered into a Cooperating Technical State (CTS) Program agreement with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in 1999.

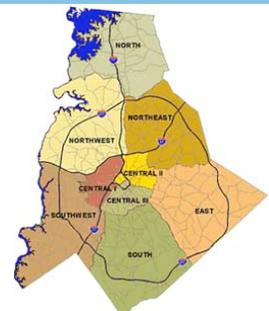
Scope of the Project:



The goal of this CTS project was to provide innovative, long-term solutions for managing storm water to ensure the public safety and economic well being of Mecklenburg County's residents and businesses. Through this CTS partnership with FEMA, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area initiated remapping efforts for all flooding sources impacting the County. The scope of the project was to draw flood maps to show not only current floodplains, but also *where floodplains will be when land upstream is developed according to current and future land use plans*. This visionary approach of accounting for future land use validated Mecklenburg County applying stiffer regulations for new developments in or adjacent to floodplains to reduce future flooding damage. Referred to as the Floodplain Land Use Map (FLUM), the projected floodplain boundaries are indicated on local maps.

Mapping Activity:

In 2000, Mecklenburg County Storm Water Services completed floodplain maps for 15 watersheds across the County. In subsequent phases, re-mapping was completed for smaller watersheds near the County's boundaries. As new maps became available for specific watersheds, they were immediately used to determine the elevation for new construction. The City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, and other surrounding governing bodies adopted the new FLUM for use in the land development process. Local officials are coordinating with FEMA to convert FLUM to a flood insurance rate map (FIRM) for flood insurance rating purposes.



Outreach:

Activities

As updated flood maps of Mecklenburg County became available, public meetings were held to explain the benefits of the re-mapping process. The maps were also made available online.

Public Meetings: Eight public meetings, using an interactive format, were held for interested property owners. Property owners were able to interact one-on-one with Mecklenburg County representatives and discuss the flooding risks shown on the preliminary, or draft, digital FIRMs.

Tools

Mecklenburg County produced materials designed to engage its citizens in the area's flood hazard mitigation program.

- **Letters:** Personal letters were prepared for property owners in flood prone areas that announced the new mapping. Copies of individual elevation certificates and an information booklet were included in the information packet.
- **Mailing lists:** The County used information from its tax department database to generate a baseline mailing list. Then, GIS staff identified property owners located in or near the floodplain, and targeted those property owners for receipt of appropriate outreach and educational materials.
- **Articles and publications:** A booklet, "The Future of Development in Mecklenburg County's Floodplains," was produced, providing background information on the area's flooding sources. The booklet defined various roles and responsibilities (including FEMA's), provided answers to frequently asked questions on floodplain issues, and offered contact information. Articles were placed in local publications.
- **Meeting materials:** An interactive communications program was developed for public meetings, including oversized post card invitations, advertisements, fact sheets and brochures.
- **Website:** The County of Mecklenburg capitalized on its website (www.charmeck.nc.us) as an effective outreach and education tool. By offering a user-friendly GIS application that identifies if a specified parcel is in the current and/or future floodplain conditions, the web site received thousands of hits every time new floodplain maps were released. The site offers concise information on all aspects of the County's program goals and status; enhanced by graphic charts, historical perspectives, and a standalone Storm Water Services "project information" section – www.stormwaterservices.com.
- **Logos:** To clearly separate the County's flood hazard mitigation program from NC State and FEMA initiatives, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services' logo was used on the County's websites and in all written materials.
- **Hotline:** A local, dedicated phone line was established to accept community calls regarding any and all flooding issues. Many homeowners initiated calls to report flooding and other drainage issues.
- **Database:** The information accumulated from the hotline was entered into a countywide database to track drainage problems and other flood-related issues. Because The County of Mecklenburg was proactive in establishing a "community presence" before re-mapping efforts began, this new information served to strengthen on-going outreach efforts.



Results

Public meetings provided opportunities to ask questions about the re-mapping process, including potential effects on property values and flood insurance rates. Through these meetings, the public was able to interact with community floodplain officials to better understand the new maps and their implications. As a result, there was no opposition when the maps came before the local governing bodies for adoption.



"A Nation Prepared" is FEMA's vision, and all at FEMA are dedicated in its mission to lead America in preparing for, preventing, responding to and recovering from disasters. If you would like more information on FEMA's Multi-Hazard Flood Map Modernization Initiative and how we may provide expert resources for you and your community, please visit our website at <http://www.fema.gov/fhm> or call 1-877-FEMA-MAP. You may view flood hazard maps at the FEMA Map store - <http://www.msc.fema.gov/>.