

## Whatcom County Buyout Program FAQ

**How long will it take until my home is purchased?** It may take several months or even years to apply for and complete an acquisition project. The average time to obligate FEMA-funded acquisitions is 16 months from the time the grant application is submitted to FEMA, but we are hopeful that their review of our applications will be expedited at the State's request. From start to finish, acquisition projects require a lot of coordination between the property owner, community, and state.

**What costs are included when I get paid as part of a buyout?** The costs that are covered as part of a property acquisition and structure demolition or relocation depend on the scope of the project (either acquisition demolition or relocation). Property owners may be reimbursed for:

- Fair market value of the real property (land and structures) either at the time of sale or immediately before the most recent flood
- Fees for necessary appraisals, title searches, title insurance, property inspections, and surveys
- Fees associated with the title transfer, contract review, and other costs associated with conducting the real estate settlement, including recording the deed and deed restrictions
- Demolition, site restoration, and site stabilization of the acquired site
- If the structure is being relocated, the reasonable cost of disassembling, moving, and reassembling any porches, decks, skirting, ramps, awnings, or other items.
- Asbestos abatement

**How is the value of my property determined?** The most common approach to estimate fair market value of the real property (land and structures or land only) is for the community to hire an appraiser when the community receives an official grant award.

**Duplication of Benefits** Because federal funds are used to acquire property, FEMA cannot duplicate the benefits paid by one program with benefits from another source. This means that FEMA will require the community to subtract from the purchase price the amount of other assistance the individual property owner might receive for the same purpose. This assistance includes flood insurance and grants that are available to individuals. However, if the property owner has receipts showing that the money was spent for its intended purpose (for example, repairing the home to make it livable again) the community will not subtract that amount documented by receipts. SAVE ALL RECEIPTS FROM DAMAGE REPAIRS.

**What happens after properties are acquired?** Once structures are removed and the land is graded, acquired properties are dedicated as open space. The properties will be maintained in perpetuity as open space for the conservation of natural floodplain functions. However, the following land uses are allowed:

- Parks for outdoor recreational activities
- Wetlands management
- Nature reserves, cultivation, grazing, and camping (except where adequate warning time is not available to allow evacuation)
- Unimproved, unpaved parking lots
- Buffer zones
- Other uses FEMA determines compatible

**Who will own the property when I sell it through the FEMA HMGP grant program?** Whatcom County or the local jurisdiction will own the property and be responsible for maintaining the land as open space.

**Am I obligated to stay in the program if I change my mind between the time the application is submitted and when the grant is awarded?** The property owner is not obligated to remain in the program and can withdraw at any time until the offer between the County and the property owner is accepted.

**Can I change my request in the FEMA HMGP grant application if I decide I would rather be acquired instead of elevating, or vice versa?** Yes; however, the County will need to make a request to FEMA and WA EMD regarding this change in scope of work and the request must be approved.