

# SETTING UP A FLOOD RISK OPEN HOUSE

## BACKGROUND

The goal of the Open House is to provide an opportunity for local residents and business owners to visit with community and county officials and to learn:

- More about the current mapping project;
- What the new Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) are and what they mean;
- What options are available if they are affected; and
- Where to find out more information.

Local county and community officials within the study area should work together to arrange, advertise and coordinate the Open House. The locations are typically based on a review of areas where there may be heightened interest due to the potential for a higher number of affected property owners and availability of meeting space. Depending upon the locale and availability of staff, example meeting times might be 2:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. (e.g., larger communities and/or significant map changes) or 4:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. (e.g., smaller communities). For areas of large adult/senior living communities, a morning meeting is often more effective (e.g., 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.).



## PRE-OPEN HOUSE OUTREACH

In advance of the Open House(s), the county and communities need to identify the best locations. When selecting the location, local officials should take into consideration ease of access and free parking, special needs groups, time of the activity for safety and working

population, access to internet for on-line maps, and functionality of the room space. The best meeting locations are typically based on centers of population and areas affected. It is recommended the local community or county place ads in the local newspaper and on radio (including Spanish-speaking ones, if there is a Hispanic population). Consideration should also be given to issuing a press release several days before the meetings to get the word out. Local officials (e.g., commissioners, council members, mayors, county managers) as well as state and U.S. legislative staff should be informed about these meetings.

## OPEN HOUSE SET-UP

Knowing that not all facilities will be configured alike, the following is a general framework for the Open Houses. Staffing assignments for each station will depend upon the availability of personnel. The need for security should be considered and requested in advance. Local fire and police should be informed about the meeting. Signage to direct people is important and sets the stage for an attendee's experience. At a minimum, the following are recommended:

Signage (waterproof) along the streets near where the meeting is being held should be set up to not only guide and direct people to the location, but also increase awareness about the meeting.

- Clear labeling of the entrance, exit and restrooms.
- Signage for each station that is supported on easels behind each table in open view of attendees.

In addition to the welcome table, which should be as close to the entrance as possible, there should be six stations for the public to visit and should be set up around the perimeter of the room in the order described. Tables with chairs should be placed in the center of the meeting room for people to sit and write (have pencils available) and review documents and other informational material. Each table should have a supply of evaluation forms for attendees to complete and a box to place completed forms. This information will help identify processes that were effective and areas for improvement for future Open Houses.

## Station 1: Welcome/Check-in

- This table should be at the very front near the entrance.
- Have a sign-in sheet for each person to provide their name and the community where they. The option to provide an email address for future updates should be included.
- A Property Owner Questionnaire should be provided to each attendee to complete (at the center tables) and use at the other stations.
- They should be reminded to complete the survey on the way out.

### Handouts:

- Floor plan and/or station layout for the visitor to see where to go. Develop a generic Floor Plan prior to Open House and edit it to a specific plan on day before meeting.
- Property Owner Questionnaire.
- Open House survey.

### Materials Required:

- Pens and paper.
- Name tags (for every station staff and other persons assisting that day).
- Sign-in sheet.

### Staffed by:

- Community/County staff

If any media/press is identified, they should be given a Press Packet and gently reminded that people will be reviewing their personal information and it should not be recorded or heard.

## Station 2: Property Location Identification (for online identification)

- This is the first station where attendees will use the information requested on the Property Owner Questionnaire. Because people may be waiting their turn, chairs should be set near this station for them to sit and wait. This could also be a good place for a project video to be running on a large screen, if one is being shown. Also, if available, one of the staff should

help direct the next property owner to the next available open technician, especially during busy times.

- If the attendee has more than one piece of property to review, then a form should be completed for each.
- Based on the information provided on the Questionnaire, the technician (on the laptop) and property owner (looking at a separate screen) will locate the property.<sup>1</sup>
- On the Questionnaire, the property owner will be able to record their current effective FIRM flood zone, their Base Flood Elevation (BFE) and their new preliminary FIRM flood zone and BFE.
- Once the property is located, the technician can print a copy of the existing and/or preliminary map for the resident. The map will indicate their zone, BFE and allow them to continue to their next station of interest; e.g., Community Map Review, Flood Insurance Station. A disclaimer will be printed on the map to indicate that it is not an official FEMA FIRM.



### Handouts:

- Property Owner Questionnaire (in case additional ones are needed).

### Materials Required:

- Laptop computers.
- LCD monitors (around 19-inch if possible) for each laptop.
- LaserJet printers (and extra ink).

---

<sup>1</sup> If online identification is not available, then paper maps will need to be used and the property owner will only have the Questionnaire to carry to the other stations.

- Paper for printer.
- Two (2) broadband wireless routers (with service).
- Pens and paper.
- Plenty of cables, extension cords, power strips & duct tape (to tape down the cords).
- Internet access (if no Internet is available in the building, use a broadband wireless system as a back-up); internet access should be tested for speed and reliability well in advance of the day of the Flood Map Open House.
- Paper copies of the old and new FIRM/FIRM Index Maps just in case Internet access goes down or becomes too slow.

#### **Staffed by:**

- Technicians who are knowledgeable in flood maps, locating properties and being able to explain the mapping process. They are not to answer detailed questions about insurance, building codes, etc., which will be addressed at other stations. This will avoid longer waiting times for newly arrived attendees.
- Training for the technicians should be held in advance of the Open House to ensure familiarity with the use of the computer and process, and to ensure a consistent message about the map changes is conveyed. Examples of the different changes (e.g., in/out of SFHA; BFE change) should be created and reviewed with the technicians so they are fully prepared.

### **Station 3: Community Map Review**

- Local community/county officials will staff these tables and will be there to discuss specific building, stormwater, etc. issues related to their community. Verify in advance by phone calls to their offices that the county/community will have at least one staff member at each Open House.
- There will be one table for each community and county. Each table should have a printed copy of their preliminary FIRMs.
- Make sure there is a separate sign for each attending NFIP community and the county set up behind the respective table(s).
- Be aware of disgruntled individuals at these tables. It is recommended that the respective community official (or other) step aside with this person and offer to set-up a private appointment to discuss their issues at a

later time. This will then allow other property owners to continue to ask their questions.

#### **Handouts:**

- Mapping Project Brochure.
- Property Owner Questionnaire (if extra are needed).
- Guide to Reading a FIRM.

#### **Materials Required:**

- Copies of preliminary FIRMs and current effective FIRMs.
- Existing and preliminary FIS Reports.
- Pens and paper.

#### **Staffed by:**

- Community official(s) (w/business cards to have on the table).
- State/FEMA representative.

### **Station 4: Appeals and Comments**

- Community/county and/or GA DNR will staff this station. There will be outreach documents and information on the process for filing an appeal and/or comments and Letters of Map Change (LOMCs).
- Be sure that the person who staffs this station has a clear understanding of the appeals/comments process.

#### **Handouts:**

- Mapping Project Brochure.
- Appeals and Comments Fact Sheet.
- FEMA Map Change Fact Sheet on LOMC, LOMAs, LOMRs, etc.
- eLOMA FEMA Fact Sheet.
- Adoption of Flood Insurance Rate Maps by Participating Communities (F-495).

#### **Materials Required:**

- Pens and paper.
- Contact information (including community official contact information).

#### **Staffed by:**

- Community/County officials and/or GA DNR.

## Station 5: Flood Insurance

- This station will be staffed by people knowledgeable in flood insurance and the effects map changes have on the requirements. Staff should be spread out enough so that each conversation is relatively private.
- One or two rows of chairs should be placed in front of this station for property owners to wait their turn.

### Handouts:

- Mapping Project Fact Sheet.
- Fact Sheets for Realty and Lending Professionals.
- Fact Sheet for Insurance Professionals.
- Insurance Agent Tips on Flood Map Changes (have available for attending agents, also good for staff talking points).
- Grandfathering Fact Sheet for Agents.
- Effects of Map Changes on Insurance: Property Owners.
- Benefits of Flood Insurance versus Disaster Assistance (F-217).
- Myths and Facts about the National Flood Insurance Program (F-002).
- Converting a Standard Rated Policy to PRP (for insurance agents).
- Preferred Risk Policy for Business Owners (F-437).
- Preferred Risk Policy for Homeowners (F-436).
- Answers to Questions about the NFIP (F-084; have a few copies to refer to).
- Listing of communities, their first FIRM effective date (for identifying pre- and post-FIRM buildings) and their CRS credits (this needs to be created individually for each county).
- NFIP Summary of Coverage (F-679).

### Materials Required:

- Pens and paper.

### Staffed by:

- Representatives knowledgeable in flood insurance and the effects of map changes. This station is often the busiest, besides Station 2.

## Station 6 (Optional): Reference Materials and Brochures

- This station will provide information not covered by the other stations, including building guides and related CDs, general flood insurance information.

### Handouts:

- Mapping Project Brochure.
- Why You Need Flood Insurance (F-683).
- Flood Preparation & Safety Brochure (F-684).
- Fact Sheets for Insurance, Building, Realty and Lending Professionals.
- Increased Cost of Compliance (F-663).
- Top 10 Facts Consumers Should Know (F-301).
- Preferred Risk Policy for Homeowners and Renters Brochure (F-437).
- Preferred Risk Policy for Business (F-436).

### Materials Required:

- Pens and paper.

### Staffed by:

- Community/county staff or FEMA Representative, though this could also be set up on the way out and not be staffed, but near the Welcome station, should there be questions.

### Other:

- Drinks and snacks provided for staff.
- Request a separate break area for the staff as part of the facility requirements.

## POST-OPEN HOUSE

Once the Open House is over, and if possible, hold a debriefing with those who staffed the different stations to receive immediate feedback. Things to ask include what went well, what could have been done better or could be enhanced, what was the feedback staff heard from the attendees, what/where were the issues, etc. Compile this information along with the results of the survey and then share it with the communities, county, and FEMA staff if they participated.