

From: Pritchett, Deisy <deisy.pritchett@fema.dhs.gov>
To: Pritchett, Deisydeisy.pritchett@fema.dhs.gov
CC: valentemickie@gmail.comvalentemickie@gmail.com
a williamsawilliams@eda.gov
Alexander, Robertrobert.alexander1@fema.dhs.gov
allen fountaina.fountain@emd.sc.gov
Barker, MelanieMelanie.Barker@fema.dhs.gov
Becker, Derrec (SCEMD PIO)dbecker@emd.sc.gov
Symmes, BrianBrianSymmes@gov.sc.gov
Adams, ChaneyChaneyAdams@gov.sc.gov
Worth, CharlesCharles.Worth@fema.dhs.gov
colton bowlescolton.b.bowles@usace.army.mil
Courtney Brockingtoncbrockington@emd.sc.gov
Pritchett, Deisydeisy.pritchett@fema.dhs.gov
Elizabeth robertseroberts@emd.sc.gov
elizabeth ryaneryan@emd.sc.gov
Farmer, Joe (SCEMD)jrfarmer@emd.sc.gov
Godfrey, Robrgodfrey@gov.sc.gov
Hardy, Gregorygregory.hardy@fema.dhs.gov
Guerrero, RangelRangel.Guerrero@fema.dhs.gov
Harper, MarkMark.Harper@fema.dhs.gov
Heyliger, JacquelineJacqueline.Heyliger@fema.dhs.gov
Homstad, JimJim.Homstad@fema.dhs.gov
Smith, JamesJames.Smith2@fema.dhs.gov
Mitchell, JessicaJessica.Mitchell@fema.dhs.gov
Johnson, DanielDaniel.Johnson4@fema.dhs.gov
Jowers, MalcolmMalcolm.Jowers@fema.dhs.gov
McKay, KathyKathy.McKay@fema.dhs.gov
katie norrisknorris@emd.sc.gov
ken braddockkbraddock@emd.sc.gov
Lopez-de-Victoria, MayraMayra.Lopez-de-Victoria@fema.dhs.gov
Toro, Manny JManny.Toro@fema.dhs.gov
McCoy, LetticeLettice.McCoy@fema.dhs.gov
melissa pottermpotter@emd.sc.gov
Phillips, MichaelMichael.Phillips2@fema.dhs.gov
Moore, Mike (FCO)Mike.Moore@fema.dhs.gov
morgan mo dennymdenny@emd.sc.gov
Nelson, JasonJason.Nelson2@fema.dhs.gov
Perez, VirgilioVirgilio.Perez@fema.dhs.gov
Robinson, Philiciaphilicia.robinson@fema.dhs.gov

Stone Jr, PricePrice.StoneJr@fema.dhs.gov
R4-EAR4-EA@fema.dhs.gov
Guerrero, RangelRangel.Guerrero@fema.dhs.gov
Schimsa, RebeccaRebeccaSchimsa@gov.sc.gov
Riddle, JanJan.Riddle@fema.dhs.gov
scott brownsbrown@emd.sc.gov
Stenson, Kim (SCEMD Director)kstenson@emd.sc.gov
steve batsonsbatson@emd.sc.gov
Patel, SwatiSwatiPatel@gov.sc.gov
Szczech, GraciaGracia.Szczech@fema.dhs.gov
Loy, TheolynTheolyn.Loy@fema.dhs.gov
Townsend, JamesJames.Townsend@fema.dhs.gov
Knight, WandaWanda.Knight@fema.dhs.gov
Bolton, Warrenwarren.bolton@fema.dhs.gov
Wilson, BettyBetty.Wilson@fema.dhs.gov
Smith, Yolanda MYolanda.Smith2@fema.dhs.gov
Pippin, ZachZachPippin@gov.sc.gov
Zuniga, RicardoRicardo.Zuniga@fema.dhs.gov

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NEWS CLIPS

SOUTH CAROLINA-DR-4241

Monday, February 01, 2016

Issues:

- None.

Summary:

- Coverage of voluntary property acquisition---a.k.a. “buyouts”---under the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program took center stage over the weekend. The story written for *The State* was also published on the web site for *The Sun News* in Myrtle Beach. The story accurately reported the state of South Carolina will ultimately decide how its mitigation dollars are spent, and property acquisition is one option.
- A Conway family that lost their home during October’s historic statewide flood will get a new one in February thanks to a local mission group and a grant from the One SC Flood Relief Fund. Included in the funding for the project are community donations of time and materials and \$14,000 from FEMA.
- More than 200 people assembled at a church in Florence County to listen to lawmakers discuss the problem of county and state roads that need repair, including those that were in disrepair before the historic October 2015 floods.

Analysis:

- None.

Social Listening Analysis:

- None.

Floods

Flood Buyouts A Long Way Off (The State)

Volunteers To Rebuild Conway Home Destroyed By October Flood (The Sun News)

Road Repairs On The Way, Officials Say, But More Money Is Needed For Improvements (Florence Morning News)

TV/Radio Clips

Floods

Flood Buyouts A Long Way Off (The State)

By Avery Wilks

Columbia (SC) State, January 31, 2016

Sam Agee is one of a number of flood-affected property owners stuck in limbo, waiting for a government buyout that might never come.

Months before the historic Oct. 4 storm, Agee bought a two-story house on Kilbourne Road, south of Lake Katherine and just uphill from Gills Creek. Agee lives nearby and hoped to sell the house to his son.

The flooding wiped out those plans, and now the house is gutted and boarded up as Agee weighs whether to go ahead with costly repairs or keep waiting on a government buyout he isn't sure will come.

"It's going to be a bitter pill either way you look at it," Agee said, "but I'd sort of like to know now."

The wait for Agee and other residents affected by the flooding will take a while longer as local governments look to secure federal hazard mitigation funds made possible by the presidential disaster declaration.

It could be 18 months or more before those funds are approved, said Derrec Becker, a spokesman for the S.C. Emergency Management Division.

Then, there are no guarantees local governments will use the money to buy out properties in flood-prone areas and convert them into green space.

The federal money, awarded after a competitive application process, can pay for a variety of efforts, including strengthening public buildings, widening culverts in waterways or buying out property. It is unclear how many federal dollars will be available for South Carolina, but the Federal Emergency Management Agency has agreed to provide an amount equal to 25 percent of the disaster's total government cost, Becker said.

FEMA money can be used to pay for 75 percent of an individual project's cost. Communities would have to come up with the other 25 percent.

"They should not wait"

Disaster officials say what to do is up to local governments.

After a 2010 flood that caused \$2 billion in damage, Nashville banned new commercial and residential development in flood-prone areas, placed limits on property owners who wanted to rebuild in floodways and bought more than 200 homes from residents for conversion into green space.

Local governments here still are weighing their options.

Columbia officials are leaning toward applying for federal hazard mitigation funds, but have not yet decided whether property buyouts would be the best use, spokeswoman Leshia Utsey said.

Richland County will pursue the hazard mitigation grant program, spokeswoman Beverly Harris said. She would not go into detail on specific programs the county might pursue.

Lexington County also is looking hard at applying for the grants, but must determine which projects to pursue and where the remaining 25 percent of matching funds would come from, County Administrator Joe Mergo said.

"The main thing is that if people are looking or waiting to do any type of repair, hoping that the government will buy out their property, they're going to be waiting for a long time," Becker said. "They should not wait."

Applications for the federal funds are submitted to the state for review and then are passed on to FEMA, Becker said. Local governments approved for buyout funds then can – with owners' consent – buy the properties, demolish any structures there and turn the property into green space.

The properties can be purchased for up to pre-disaster fair market value, unless the local government chooses to use the property's assessed tax value. The property would then be turned into a public park or left undeveloped, but it could never again be redeveloped, Becker said.

An ideal outcome

Agee and other owners of property near waterways say a pre-flood market-value buyout would be the ideal outcome.

Sabrina Todd, who lives on Glenhaven Drive in an area heavily damaged by floodwaters from nearby Gills Creek, said she and other residents in the South Beltline Boulevard-area neighborhood likely would welcome a mass buyout. Many of the homes there remain boarded up, with 'X's spray-painted on front doors and windows.

"With all the development that's happened upstream, and all the dams, it doesn't seem like this neighborhood ought to be here," Todd said.

Erich Miarka, program coordinator for the Gills Creek Watershed Association, called potential government buyouts "a tremendous opportunity."

"If you can move those properties out of the floodplain, we're taking people out of harm's way. We're taking properties out of harm's way," he said.

Agee, meanwhile, isn't sure of his next move.

He estimates it would cost about \$180,000 to repair the house to a state where someone would consider buying it. But he said if he were assured a buyout would come in 18 months, he could live with paying the property's insurance and taxes until he could sell it to Columbia.

"If they will just say, 'Yes, we'll buy it, but it'll take 18 months to do it,' or, 'No, we're not going to buy it,' then I can move on," he said.

Volunteers To Rebuild Conway Home Destroyed By October Flood (The Sun News)

By Angela Nicholas

[Myrtle Beach \(SC\) Sun News](#), January 30, 2016

A Conway family that lost their home during October's historic statewide flood will get a new one in February thanks to a local mission group and a grant from the One SC Flood Relief Fund.

Built in 1919, the house where 51-year-old S.C. DOT trade specialist Archie Simmons lived with his disabled mother and sister was razed recently to make room for new construction.

"We lost our home," Simmons said, "and everything in it."

He said he had returned on clear roads from a 12-hour workday. He had been napping for about an hour when his mother started shaking him to get up. He said the floodwaters rose so quickly the family had to hurry to get out. Floodwaters had already covered the yard and the road.

Four feet of water saturated the house for more than two weeks during the record storm that killed 17 people and prompted Gov. Nikki Haley to declare a state of emergency. Irreparable damage left the Simmons family homeless.

The family's dire situation came to the attention of Todd Wood, resort missionary with IMPACT Ministries, who worked to obtain \$25,000 from the flood fund set up under the umbrella of the Central Carolina Community Foundation. The money is being used to assist three Horry County families who suffered flood damage, he said. Much of the funding, along with community donations of time and materials and \$14,000 from FEMA, is designated to rebuild the Simmons home.

Wood said IMPACT Ministries worked with Horry County Emergency Management and VOAD (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster) to provide disaster response to help families whose homes were damaged by water and mud. From October through November, 174 Horry County homes were "mudded out" and repaired by volunteer laborers that included Mennonite crews from out of state.

The three most damaged homes, which includes the Simmons home plus a house off Highway 90 and one in Forest Brook, needed additional help. With the aid of the flood relief fund two of them have been repaired. The Simmons home, however, was too damaged to save, Wood said.

"We took a team in to mud the house out, but there was just nothing left to save," Wood said. "With two of the three family members disabled, I knew we had to step in and help them get a new home."

Wood said the home will be rebuilt from the ground up using volunteer labor. Greg McFarland of PMH Architects donated his time to the mission project preparing house plans reworked from a previous IMPACT Ministries build in Myrtle Beach. The plans are for a 1,000-square-foot home to be raised 9 feet off the ground due to its proximity to the lake.

"Raising the house high enough to be safe from future flooding posed a problem for Archie's disabled mom and sister," Wood said. To address that problem, Seaside Elevators of Little River has stepped in to install an elevator.

Other donors include Ashleigh Weatherly of Kyzer & Timmerman Structural Engineers who donated structural plans and Lowe's, which has donated cabinets. Through a partnership with Catholic Charities, all new furniture will be provided through the organization's "House in a Box" program.

While the American Red Cross stepped in to help the family with some immediate needs after the flooding, the

Salvation Army has provided \$1,500 to be used for the purchase of building materials, Wood said.

“We’ll have tons of people like this donating everything from port-a-johns to plumbing to electrical,” Wood said.

A man from North Carolina brought his bobcat down recently to help tear down what was left of the house. Simmons said the house was gutted in four hours and he took some time off work to help out by burning the debris.

Everything is on hold until site work — which includes bringing in loads of dirt to level the ground — can be completed. Wood anticipates the build will begin the third or fourth week of February and will take two weeks. He already has a group of college students scheduled the last week of February to help with painting, landscaping and the move in, but other volunteers are needed.

Simmons said his family is grateful for the help and feels especially blessed to have Wood and IMPACT Ministries looking out for them.

“The good Lord always looks out for his children and I believe he sent us Todd to be our guardian angel,” Simmons said.

While he looks forward to returning to the land his family has called home for decades, he said the loss of the house was especially devastating because his father died suddenly of a heart problem only 17 months ago. One of the few items the family recovered from the water soaked home was a severely damaged and irreplaceable family photo with his dad partially visible.

To donate to the project or to volunteer, contact Wood at (843) 254-7777 or email todd@impactmb.org

Road Repairs On The Way, Officials Say, But More Money Is Needed For Improvements (Florence Morning News)

By Dianne Owens

[Florence \(SC\) Morning News](#), January 30, 2016

NESMITH, S.C. – Williamsburg County roads needed help long before October’s flood washed some of them, along with their bridges, away, leaving crevices and ravines 20 feet or more deep and wide.

Williamsburg County resident Lecretia Pressley told state lawmakers this past week during a public forum in Friendship United Methodist Church, and the lawmakers agreed with her, that something has to be done to bring the state’s roads back up to par.

For Pressley, like most at the meeting, her usual 10-minute commute to the church was extended by 20 minutes because the McCottry Bridge on Battery Park Road over the Black Mingo River, a major route for area travelers, is still out. That road is one of two still closed in the county, needing significant repairs before being reopened.

The other bridge, the smaller of the two, the St. Mark Bridge on the Old Georgetown Highway near Indiantown, crosses over Boggy Swamp.

If all goes well, said Richard Livingston, Williamsburg County SC Department of Transportation representative at the meeting, preliminary work will begin in a few weeks and be complete in June for the Battery Park Road bridge and April-May on the other.

Representatives Carl Anderson and Cezar McKnight, and Sen. Ronnie Sabb, agreed that though it feels as if it is taking a long time to complete repairs, the county’s condition is not unique in the state, and work is being done.

More than 200 people assembled at the church to listen to the lawmakers discuss the problem of inadequate roads in the county and state.

“It took 30 years to create this problem,” McKnight said. “It’ll take time to get us back out of this mess.”

Williamsburg County Council member W.B. Wilson (District 2), who sponsored and coordinated the meeting, said his citizens are suffering and he wanted to spotlight the plight of the road-weary travelers. He said he wants to make sure richer counties in the state are not getting their roads repaired at the expense of his county.

“They have to go around and come back at it,” he said, of residents traveling to work at House of Raeford on Battery Park Road. “I wish it could be done sooner, but I wanted the people to hear what is being done and to see help is coming, even if slowly,”

“The General Assembly’s got to do something,” he added. That McCottry Bridge is key, he said, adding miles and minutes to commutes and wear and tear to vehicles.

Some drivers have to go an hour out of their way, he added.

Anderson distributed a letter he had received on Jan. 21 from SCDOT’s Chief Engineer for Operations, Andrew Leaphart, saying there are still 50 roads closed in the state. The Battery Park Road bridge, he said, will be a full replacement and is under contract with United Infrastructure. The bridge on Old Georgetown Highway, he said, is “being expedited by SCDOT and ... will be constructed by SCDOT’s in-house bridge crew...”

And while money is allocated to repairs, upgrades and bettering the roads, Sabb said, is not in the budget.

“For that we need a recurring source of funds,” McKnight said.

“The roads were a disaster before the disaster happened,” Patricia Burroughs said. The potholes on Roper Woods Road, another heavily traveled secondary road maintained by the county, is filled with potholes and the repairs don’t last long, she said.

“We’re here to tell you we do understand,” Anderson said, adding, “You’re so close. Two miles to where you want to be and you have to go 12 to get there ... We understand your frustration.”

“This is an enduring crisis,” Sabb said. “You have to understand, we have to keep going through this crisis ... But sometimes a calamity can bring a blessing.”

Sabb said he is hopeful the state’s lawmakers will discuss increasing the state’s road tax to better fund road and bridge projects. That idea was never fully discussed during this past year’s session.

North Carolina and Georgia, McKnight said, index their state tax to the cost of gasoline at the pump. That system seems to work in their states, he said.

“I don’t want you to think I’m here making excuses,” Sabb said. “I’m just here telling you it’s going to take time to go from a washout to a new bridge ... Your suffering is not lost on us. But I’m not going to lie to you.”

In the two weeks we’ve been back at the Statehouse, he said, he’s seen “flood relief,” for farmers as well, become a priority issue for lawmakers.

“SCDOT is working on this as fast they can,” Sabb said. “We don’t want our ambulances to have to take the long way around ... we understand public safety.”

Livingston said the state is seeking FEMA reimbursement for repairs, but that FEMA does not pay for upgrades. When those are done, the state or county incurs that cost. Cost to repair the McCottry Bridge will be \$3.4 million, he said. And it’ll take at least \$750,000 to do the Old Georgetown Highway. There are two other county bridges slated for repair, Livingston said, one on Turkey Creek Road and another on Mingo Chandler Road.

“We had that money allocated before the storm,” he said.

Gov. Nikki Haley proffered a gas tax increase, if it was coupled with a cut in the state’s income tax, Sabb said. He’d like to see the increase, but isn’t sure the cut is needed.

The state’s legislature is likely to begin its 2016-17 budget process in March.

This past week, the state’s interim Transportation Secretary Christy Hall was reported to have told a roads-advocacy group that it will take an added \$1.2 billion a year to bring South Carolina’s existing roads to perfect condition.

That estimate removes costs for mass transit and new roads from the added \$1.5 billion a year that the transportation agency previously estimated is needed to fix the state’s crumbling roads through 2040. Hall was speaking at the state’s annual S.C. Alliance to Fix Our Roads meeting.

She went on to be quoted as saying she knows that amount of funding is not achievable.

TV/Radio Clips

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Today (News)

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