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CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION'S BLUE ACRES BUYOUT PROGRAM EXPANDS INTO RAHWAY AND DOWNE TOWNSHIP, NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED FLOOD RECOVERY PROGRAM COMPLETES OFFERS TO MORE THAN 700 HOMEOWNERS AND CLOSES ON MORE THAN 430 PROPERTIES

TRENTON – The Department of Environmental Protection's Superstorm Sandy Blue Acres Buyout Program is expanding into Rahway, Union County, and Downe Township in Cumberland County, making buyout offers to get families in repeatedly flooded areas out of harm's way and to help improve flood resiliency in both communities.

The expansion into Rahway and Downe is the latest accomplishment for the Blue Acres program that has completed offers to more than 700 families in 12 municipalities affected by Superstorm Sandy in October 2012 and other previous devastating storms.

To date, Blue Acres has secured funding to purchase 797 properties statewide with buyouts under way in seven counties. Of the 724 offers extended, 543 have been accepted. Closings have been completed on more than 439 properties, and more than 333 of those properties have been demolished.

"The Blue Acres Buyout Program is committed to fulfilling the Christie Administration's goal of moving residents in flood-prone communities to safer ground so those families can enjoy their homes and live without fear of additional flooding and damages," DEP Commissioner Bob Martin said. "Keeping families safe is just one part of our multi-pronged approach to make New Jersey more flood resilient."

To date, Blue Acres has successfully secured $284 million in federal disaster recovery funds for post-Sandy acquisitions, including $169 million from the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HGMP); $100 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program; and $15 million from the Blue Acres fund and the State Land Acquisition (Urban) fund.

While the Sandy-damaged communities of Sayreville Borough, South River Borough, and Woodbridge Township (all in Middlesex County) were among the first to take advantage of the Blue Acres Buyout Program, purchases have been extended to flood-prone areas including: Manville Borough (Somerset County); Linden and Rahway (Union County); Lawrence Township and Downe Township (Cumberland County); East Brunswick Township and Old Bridge Township (Middlesex County); Pompton Lakes Borough (Passaic County); and Newark City (Essex County). The program is also expanding into New Milford (Bergen County).

Governor Christie designated the Blue Acres Buyout Program in 2013 to run the state's post-Sandy effort to purchase homes from willing sellers in flood-prone areas, at pre-Sandy values. A special implementation team expedites the buyout process, and includes individual case managers that work closely with homeowners to personally guide them throughout the entire buyout process. After a Blue Acres purchase is completed, the homes are demolished and the land is permanently preserved as open space for recreation or conservation purposes.

Recently the Blue Acres Buyout program was recognized by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as a Best Practice, citing the program's Benefit Cost Analysis (BCA) approach to significantly reduce the number of properties requiring extensive and time-consuming reviews. Additionally, HUD recognized Blue Acres for negotiating mortgage forgiveness on properties where the amount owed exceeds the home's value.