



PROJECT Recovery

HARVEY



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Applications for Flood Assistance Ceasing in Response to COVID-19 Community Services Department to Continue Processing Applications Already in the System

HARRIS COUNTY, Texas – In response to County guidance urging residents to avoid gathering in groups and to maintain social distancing, Harris County Project Recovery will cease accepting new applications from homeowners seeking flood damage assistance, beginning Friday, March 20, 2020, until at least July 1, 2020. After that time, the application process will reopen if there is additional funding available.

Project Recovery staff, many of whom will be working remotely to prevent the spread of COVID-19, will use phone calls rather than face-to-face visits with homeowners to discuss information and documents needed to advance their requests to the Texas General Land Office (GLO) for review and approval.

“Despite this measure, we will continue our focus on providing assistance to homeowners who have already asked for help,” said Joshua Stuckey, interim director of Harris County Community Services Department, which administers Project Recovery. “We are ramping up our effort to connect with those 5,000 county residents who have not heard from us in a while through what we call Operation Reach Out,” Stuckey said. He added that the goal is to have 2,000 homeowner funding requests into the approval pipeline within the next 90 days.

To date, Project Recovery has received approximately 8,000 applications for home repair reimbursement, home reconstruction and home buyout.

After revamping processes and procedures to speed assistance to homeowners, Project Recovery began reimbursing homeowners who made repairs at their own expense following Hurricane Harvey. In the last 90 days, \$10.9 million in reimbursement requests have been submitted to the Texas General Land Office (GLO) for approval. To date, reimbursement checks totaling more than \$1 million have been issued to homeowners. Project Recovery staff will continue working with homeowners and the GLO to get the reimbursement program completed while ramping up phone calls to applicants for the home repair and reconstruction program.

The level of documentation required to determine program eligibility has been a frustration for all involved. Project Recovery’s funding is from an allocation by HUD to the Texas General Land Office and then to Harris County. Each layer of bureaucracy has requirements that must be met, resulting in some 53 different sets of documents needed for homeowners to show program eligibility. Any missing or questionable documents mean significant delays in approving funding requests.

The GLO and Project Recovery staff have joined forces to accelerate the time it takes to get funds to homeowners. The GLO has stationed a strike team in the Project Recovery office to help address questions, review applicant documents and speed the rate that files are moved through the system to approval. Project Recovery has changed several program processes to speed the overall delivery of funding requests to the GLO, and most recently, to minimize the level of face-to-face contact required of homeowners requesting assistance. Michael Spletto of Tetra Tech Disaster Recovery, whom Stuckey named Chief Operations Officer for Project Recovery, has streamlined the procurement process, activated electronic signatures and raised the funding caps on the reconstruction program, allowing more assistance to eligible homeowners.

Spletto has significant experience with state and federal disaster recovery rules and regulations, having provided recovery program consultation for more than \$20 billion in HUD Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding over a career spanning 30 years of HUD CDBG program experience. He was the disaster recovery director for the State of Louisiana for Hurricane Katrina, and later worked for a consulting firm as the disaster recovery director for Harris County following Hurricane Ike.

“We will work with each homeowner to ensure their documentation is complete so when we submit their file, the GLO has everything needed to approve their eligibility and doesn’t have to come back to us for additional information,” Spletto said.

In addition to contacting homeowners impacted by Hurricane Harvey, Project Recovery is also reaching out to those whose homes were flooded in 2016.

If you previously completed an application with Harris County for single-family rehabilitation or reconstruction assistance and want to get a head start on completing the eligibility documentation, download the forms at <https://harrisrecovery.org/formsflyers/>. For general information about the program, visit www.HarrisRecovery.org.

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About Project Recovery – Project Recovery exists to assist Harris County residents in restoring homes damaged by floods experienced in 2015, 2016 and Hurricane Harvey through an array of options including homeowner repair reimbursement, new home construction, homeowner buyout for flood mitigation, affordable rental, local infrastructure improvements and new transit options. Through Project Recovery, the Harris County Community Services Department and other county departments ensure projects are complete, with the goal of improving the long-term resiliency of Harris County.