

Wayne, New Jersey



Buyout Area in Wayne, NJ. Photo by author

Background

Wayne is a mid-sized township of just under 55,000 inhabitants located in Passaic County, in northern New Jersey (see Figure 1). The township is 27 square miles, located less than 20 miles from Midtown Manhattan. The township, largely suburban in nature, exhibits a varied landscape comprised of mountainous terrain as well as low-lying, flood-prone areas along the Passaic River (Open Space Plan, 2005)

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, Wayne was a farming community. In the early 20th century, however, Wayne became a vacation haven for wealthy New Yorkers. In the summer months, visitors would come from Manhattan and Brooklyn to live in the summer bungalows and enjoy the rivers and lakes that are scattered throughout the township. During and following World War II, however, many of these summer bungalows were converted to year-round residences. These permanent, small residences served to accommodate factory workers brought in for war-related production, and the once-vast farmland was also converted into housing (Township of Wayne).

Figure 1: Location Map



History of Flooding

The low-lying areas of Wayne, particularly along the Pompton River, have a long history of flooding. The Pompton River, which lies on the western and southern border of Wayne, empties into the Passaic River, which flows through Paterson and Newark before discharging into the Newark Bay. When the Passaic River rises, it can back up into the Pompton River, intensifying flooding upstream. Major flood events occurred during Hurricane Floyd (1999), a seven-day Nor'easter that caused severe flooding (2007), Hurricane Irene (2011), Tropical Storm Lee (2011), and Hurricane Sandy (2012).

Many neighborhoods have suffered repeated flooding. According to New Jersey's Hazard Mitigation Report released in 2014, 762 households in Wayne have suffered "repetitive losses" due to flooding over the past three-and-a-half decades. Repetitive losses are defined by the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) as any property that is an insurable building for which

two or more claims of over \$1,000 have been paid by the NFIP within a ten-year period since 1978.

Table 1: Summary Demographics

	Wayne	New Jersey
Population (2010)	54,709	8,791,894
Housing units	19,768	3,553,562
Owner occupied (%)	80.5	65
Black (%)	2.3	13.7
White (%)	80.5	68.6
Hispanic or Latino (%)	7.9	17.7
Asian	8.2	8.3
High school degree (%)	93	88
Bachelor's degree (%)	50	36
Median household income	\$104,825	\$72,062
Poverty rate (%)	4.1	11.1

Source: Census.gov Quick Tables (2010)

Wayne is relatively wealthy community with a much higher median household income and lower poverty rate than the state as a whole (Table 1). A higher percentage of its residents are high school or college graduates, and Wayne has a larger share of Whites (80.5% vs. 68.6%) and smaller share of Blacks (2.3% vs. 13.7%) compared to the state average. Finally, a larger share of its housing is owner occupied: 80.5% vs. 65%.

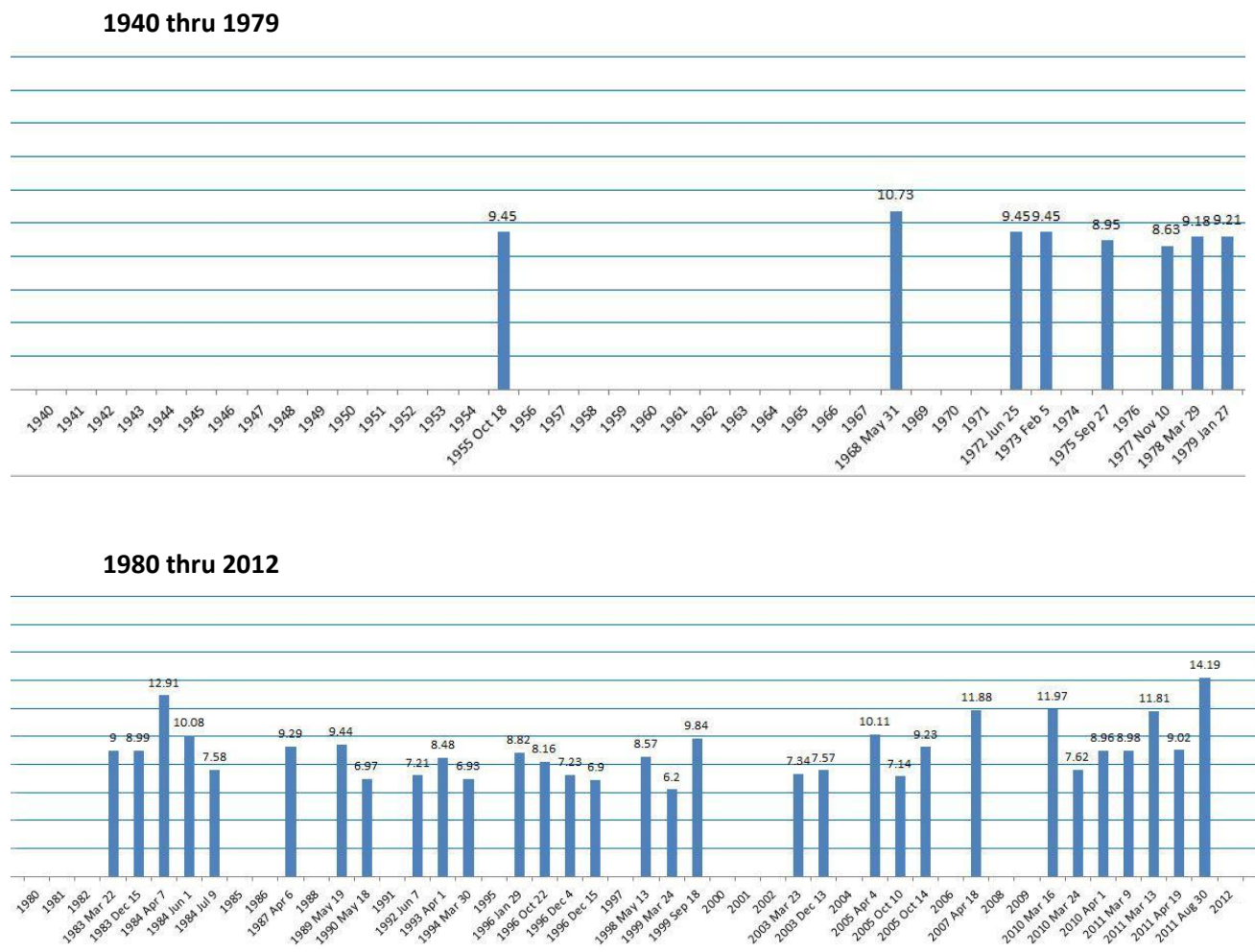
Wayne has more repetitive loss properties than any other municipality in the state. Although flooding has always been a reoccurring event in Wayne, the frequency of flooding and historic crests has increased over the last century. Figure 2 shows historical crests on the Passaic River between 1940 and 2012. The graph shows the increased frequency of high water levels in the river. High crests typically are associated with flooding.

The most recent flooding the township has sustained was in 2011 (Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee) and 2012 (Sandy), according to Mark McGrath, Wayne Police Captain and Office of Emergency Management Coordinator. Hurricane Sandy caused extensive wind damage, but less flooding than Irene and Lee. On August 28, 2011, Hurricane Irene deluged Wayne with ten inches of rainfall--the third highest rainfall recorded for the state during the storm--inundating homes, closing roads and causing extensive damage throughout the community. Over 200,000 homes were damaged.

The Buyout

In December 2011, FEMA announced that eight of the towns devastated by Irene would receive more than \$28 million from its Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. Wayne received the most funding from the voluntary program, totaling \$6.3 million to buy approximately 56 flood-damaged parcels. After Hurricane Sandy in 2012, more buyout applications were received, totaling approximately 100 homes. According to the Draft Hazard Mitigation Plan for Passaic County, which includes Wayne, the township has acquired a total of 133 homes with funding coming primarily from the Community Development Block Grants.

Figure 2: Historical Crests on the Passaic River: 1940 - 2012



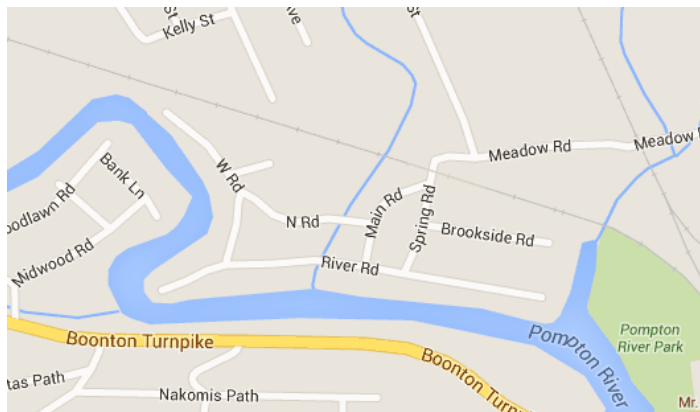
Source: National Weather Service: <http://water.weather.gov/ahps2/crests.php?wfo=phi&gage=ltfn4>

The township received \$1.8 million in federal CDBG funds to purchase 17 homes in an area known as Hoffman Grove. This neighborhood consists primarily of small bungalows that were

built along the Pompton River over 50 years ago and were used as summer getaways for people living in Newark and New York. Over the years, people expanded and improved the homes for year-round use, making them permanent residences. The area is located between a railroad and the Pompton River (Figure 3). Most of the houses in Hoffman Grove are on the low end of housing values for the area, although a few of the homes that remain are beautifully cared for (Figure 4). The house shown in Figure 4 backs up against the Pompton River. It has been elevated eight feet to reduce the risk of flooding. Still, the home was flooded with two-feet of water during Hurricane Irene. The homeowner stated that he declined to participate in the buyout because he likes living along the water and because he can't afford to live elsewhere in the township. Renters in the neighborhood face a similar problem: they can't afford to live elsewhere. Housing prices in Wayne are well above the state median.

According to Mark McGrath, Wayne Police Captain and OEM Coordinator, not many people were interested in participating during the first round of buyouts. Then Irene struck and people became more interested. Before the floods, all the properties were occupied. Now some have been abandoned and remain vacant, and may even be adjacent to already razed parcels. Several homes that have been acquired are still awaiting demolition.

Figure 3: Hoffman Homes Buyout Area



According to Mark, the Town is on the 4th round of buyouts. The buyouts take time, which can be very frustrating for homeowners. There are several steps along the way, including notification, public meetings, applications, appraisals, negotiation, award, closing, demolition contracting, permitting (for demolition), and restoration of the site. In addition, if the homeowner is not in agreement with the appraisal paid for by the project, they can pay for their own appraisal, adding even more time to the process.

Figure 4: Well-kept Home in Hoffman Grove, Wayne, NJ



Figure 5: Location of Buyouts in Wayne, NJ

Buyouts: Wayne Township, Passaic County, NJ

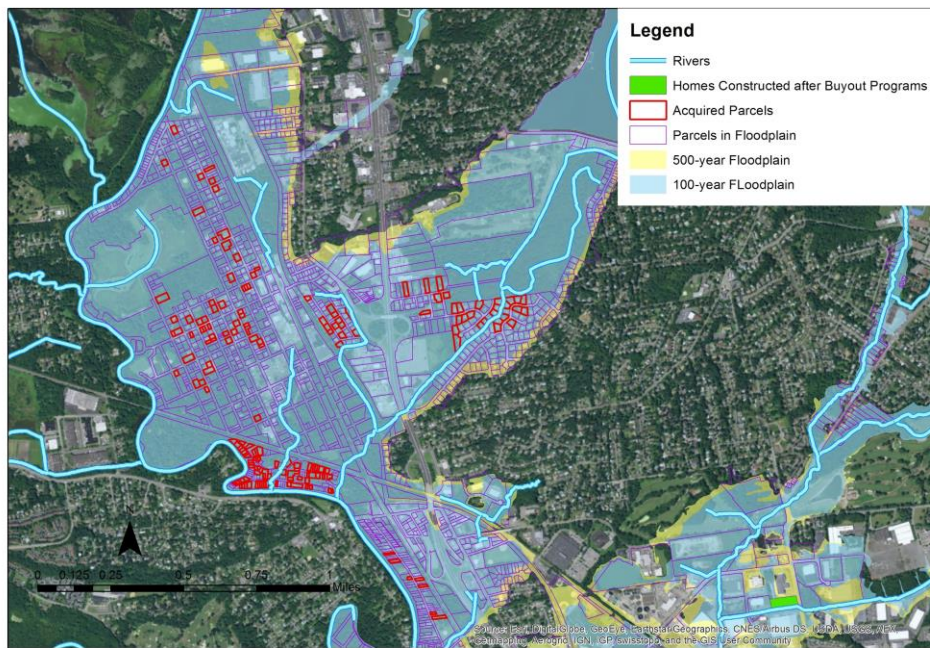
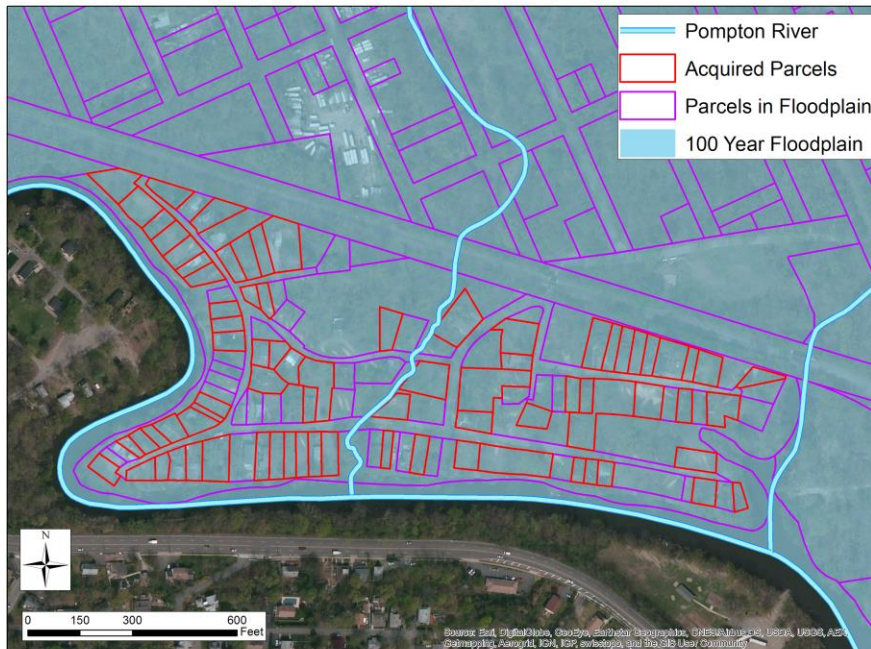


Figure 6: Location of Buyouts in Hoffman Grove

Buyouts: Hoffman Grove Neighborhood, Wayne, NJ



Current use

As shown in Figure 5 and 6, buyouts occurred throughout the township, but particularly in Hoffman Grove. Given the patchwork nature of the buyout, it has been difficult to convert these lands into forest, wetlands or recreational areas. In some areas, including Hoffman Grove, where several acquired homes are still standing, public use of the acquired properties is limited. This is a common problem among buyouts.

Integration with Hazard Mitigation Plan

Wayne's acquisition and razing of homes in flood-prone areas directly follows recommendations set out in the New Jersey Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP). The plan (Section 6) calls for the "buyout program to acquire properties from willing sellers in repetitive flood loss areas." The HMP also says these acquired properties are to be razed and maintained as open space, thus reducing the risk of future flood waters, while keeping people and property out of harm's way.

Figure 7: Vacant lot and occupied home in buyout area



Passaic County also adopted a HMP, which calls on the township to support the mitigation of vulnerable structures via retrofit or acquisition to protect structures from future damage. It sets priority on repetitive loss and severe repetitive loss properties when applicable. The plan lays out two main steps in floodplain mitigation:

- Phase 1: Identify appropriate candidates and determine most cost-effective mitigation option.
- Phase 2: Work with the property owners to implement selected action based on available funding and local match availability

Integration with Land Use Plan

Wayne adopted a Land Use Plan Amendment in 2010 within the Wayne Planning and Zoning Master Plan. The amendment specifically covers floodplain buyouts, stating that the township should actively “reduce the impacts of flooding in the most flood-prone areas by encouraging property owners to participate in a program for relocating homes.” The amendment also states that the township is an active participant in encouraging property owners to participate in the flood hazard area buy-out program.

Wayne also has adopted an Open Space and Recreation plan, which was last updated in 2005. One of the goals of this plan is to “support conservation efforts in order to preserve environmentally sensitive lands.” In 2003, Wayne enacted an open space tax, two cents per \$100 in property tax valuation, to fund the acquisition of open space, including the purchase of flood-damaged homes.

Conclusion

The Township of Wayne is no stranger to flooding. In fact, flooding seems to have become more prevalent and more damaging over the past 15 years. Wayne has responded by adopting an Open Space and Recreation Plan and a hazard mitigation plan, through the county, that

emphasizes the importance of protecting its floodplains and wetlands. In addition, Wayne has been actively pursuing buyouts, using federal, state and local funds, as a way to reduce future risks and add to its inventory of open space.

As in many other communities, however, the patchwork nature of the buyout limits the use of the acquired lands. Houses are interspersed among vacant lots. The buyout seldom comprises a sufficient number of contiguous properties to create parkland or wildlife habitat. However, over time, Wayne could purchase many, if not all, of the remaining properties in its flood hazard areas.

Resources Cited

Wayne Township Open Space Plan. 2005.

Township of Wayne website, accessed April 28, 2016: <http://www.waynetownship.com/history-wayne.html>