

City offers help for repeatedly flooded properties

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

The City Council approved the acquisition of a home that has been repeatedly flooded, one of several properties in flood plains the city has acquired using federal grants.

With the remnants of two hurricanes hitting Winston-Salem in a matter of weeks, heavy rains have caused flooding in various parts of the city. But for some properties, flooding can be a regular occurrence. There's more than 18,000 acres of mapped flood plains in the county, which accounts for seven percent of its total land area. Current regulations say that new buildings in these areas must be elevated one foot above the base flood level and protected from potential flood damage.

Buildings that were built before those requirements do not have such protection. That's where the FEMA Severe Repetitive Flood Claims grants come in. They let local municipalities purchase the properties and make sure they're not built upon again.

Keith Huff, the city's director of Stormwater/Erosion Control, said residents will contact them about their properties and the city applies for the grant. He said the most viable applications involve the "worst of the worst" flood-ravaged properties.

"The most probable candidates are the severe repetitive-loss properties, meaning they have a number of claims on their flood insurance policies and the cost-benefit of their project is very compelling to FEMA," said Huff.

The property the council voted to purchase on

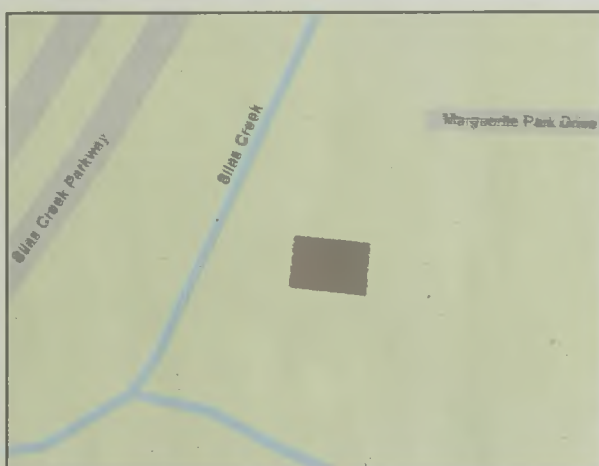


Image by Todd Luck

This map shows the home on Marguerite Park Drive, near Silas Creek, that the City Council voted to acquire because it has experienced repeated severe flooding.

Monday contains a house at the end of Marguerite Park Drive with Silas Creek to its east and one of the creek's tributaries to its south. Huff said the house has had structural flooding in the crawl space, damaging the house's ductwork and HVAC and sometimes reaching the finished floor of its inhabited spaces.

The grant covers the acquisition of the property for its fair market value of \$170,000 minus any duplication of benefits that it received from prior FEMA claims. The grant also covers 100 percent of the demolition and plac-



Huff

ing deeded restrictions to prevent further development on the parcel.

The city previously purchased the neighboring property next door with a grant from the same FEMA program. Robert Clark, who represents the West Ward where the properties are located, directed staff to look into combining the two properties and turning them into a passive pocket park, which would be an allowed use under the restrictions put on the land.

For more information, contact the Stormwater/Erosion Control Department at (336) 747-7480.



City of Winston-Salem photo

The city is considering purchasing the land shown here below the highway off ramp bordered by Liberty, Cemetery and Main streets.

W-S considering buying lot from Salem College

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The City of Winston-Salem is considering buying a downtown lot near Business 40 from Salem College for \$450,850.

The .45 acre vacant lot is just south of Business 40 and is bordered by Liberty, Cemetery and Main streets and an off ramp from the highway that leads to Main and Liberty streets. That Main Street Exit ramp there will be removed when Business 40 renovations are completed, which is expected to happen in late 2020. The right-of-way land where the ramp is located is expected to be conveyed to the city, which could expand that property if the city did purchase it. The money to buy it would come from 2014 general obligation bonds for economic development sites and infrastructure.

The land for sale was purchased by Salem College for \$625,000 in 2012. It's located across Main Street from the college's McHugh Sisters Flats, which opened in 2015. This summer, it was reported that Salem College owes about \$26 million and was put on probation by an accreditation agency, which said the college is still in good standing but needs to eliminate the debt to be taken off probation. The college is working to raise money to pay the debt without raising tuition.

During the City Council Finance Committee meeting on Monday, Oct. 8, the offer to buy the land at the appraised value of \$450,850 got mixed reactions. The college put the lot on the open market and informed City Council John Larson of the opportunity. Larson said the land is strategically located between the heart of downtown and places like Old Salem. It's also near The Strollway that connects those two areas.

City Council Member Jeff MacIntosh and Finance Chairman Robert Clark also saw potential in the land once it's combined with the adjoining right of way.

"We don't do this every day, but it's not every day we get offered this type of arrangement," said Clark.

City Council Member Derwin Montgomery, who is also co-owner of The Chronicle, said he didn't object to the principle of buying the land, but asked if the city would be buying property in the inner city as well. He said land purchases should be part of a strategy and wanted a short list of properties the city might be interested in.

Mayor Pro Tempore Vivian Burke questioned the sale and wanted a list of properties the city already owns.

City Council Member D.D. Adams said she couldn't support the purchase when there were properties in the inner city that could be bought for businesses or affordable housing.

Clark decided to table the item until next month to give staff time to answer the council members' question.

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