



Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office

Disaster Planning for Historic Properties in Monroe County

Project Summary

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission's (PHMC) Bureau for Historic Preservation has partnered with the County of Monroe on a nationally innovative planning project that will help to protect the county's historic buildings, structures, and sites from the threat of natural disasters and preserve them for the enjoyment of future generations.

The recent update to the Monroe County Comprehensive Plan, adopted in December 2014, notes that *"Historic resources are a vital part of the county's character, contribute to the county's appeal as a tourism destination, and thus play an important role in the economy."* Despite the important role historic resources play in the county, however, these assets are not specifically addressed in the current Monroe County Hazard Mitigation Plan, and thus there is currently no County plan in place to protect them from natural disasters. Working closely with the PHMC as a Disaster Planning for Historic Properties project partner, however, will ensure that the County has a plan by as early as 2017. As a result, **Monroe County will be among the first counties in the United States to have integrated historic property information into its FEMA-approved Hazard Mitigation Plan.**

In Monroe County, a pilot project of the Commonwealth's Disaster Planning for Historic Properties Initiative will produce a comprehensive inventory of hazard-prone historic resources for integration into the County's Hazard Mitigation Plan, of which an update is currently ongoing. The project will also develop detailed historic property vulnerability assessments and appropriate mitigation strategies for these irreplaceable community assets, prioritized through public input—all for the very first time—making Monroe County's most cherished historic properties less vulnerable and more resilient in the face of, and in the wake of, future natural disasters.

The PHMC has procured the professional services of AECOM Technical Services, Inc. to conduct Phase 1 of the project, which will involve the survey work necessary to identify the hazard-prone historic resources throughout the county. A separate consultant will be contracted by PHMC in the coming weeks to conduct the hazard vulnerability assessments and develop the mitigation strategies for these resources as part of Phase 2 and integrate this information into the County's Hazard Mitigation Plan update by 2017. This will be achieved in close cooperation with the County's contracted hazard mitigation planning consultant MCM Consulting Group, Inc., and PHMC's state and federal interagency partners including the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Region III.

According to the 2012 Monroe County Hazard Mitigation Plan, flooding is ranked as the #1 natural hazard posing a threat to life and property in the county. As such, PHMC's consultant AECOM Technical Services, Inc. will conduct a countywide survey of historic resources in Monroe County in the 100-year and 500-year flood hazard areas. As part of this survey to document previously unidentified historic resources (buildings, structures, districts, sites, and objects), the survey team will also revisit properties already documented in the County's and the Commonwealth's historic resource inventories to update records and, more importantly, collect information on their precise location within flood plains and the vertical elevation of buildings' first floor level and openings (doors and windows, etc.) where water may enter during a flood event. This information, which largely does not exist to date for Pre-FIRM buildings (those constructed prior to 1975, or before most communities' first FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps were produced in the United States), will enable hazard mitigation planners to better understand, and in some cases predict, how and which historic buildings may become damaged during a flood. The information will also enable hazard planners to estimate historic building replacement costs and develop effective mitigation strategies to better protect these community assets and preserve them for future generations, as well as potentially reduce flood insurance premiums for the owners of historic buildings.

The field survey enabled by this project will be the first comprehensive countywide survey of historic resources that Monroe County has seen in more than 35 years, and will provide a much-needed update to the County's and the State Historic Preservation Office's records. Additionally, historic resources newly identified as part of this survey effort that may be determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, may in turn become eligible for a host of state and federal grant opportunities and tax incentives including the state and federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits.

The PHMC has committed \$130,000.00 for this innovative project in Monroe County. No local funding match will be required. The project is expected to be completed by the fall of 2016, when the County's draft hazard mitigation plan update is due to FEMA for review.

On September 16, 2015, the County of Monroe Board of Commissioners adopted *Resolution No. 24 of 2015*, authorizing the County's participation in, and officially affirming the County's support for, the Monroe County pilot project of the Disaster Planning for Historic Properties Initiative.

For more information about this project and to learn how you may be able to provide input as a member of the public, please contact Jeremy Young, Project Manager for Pennsylvania's Disaster Planning for Historic Properties Initiative, at 717-787-0771 or jereyoung@pa.gov.

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