

## **RX DISCOVERY 2011: City of Homer, Floodplain Administrator Interview**

*Meeting Notes*

**January 25, 2011, 4:00 pm MT, interview via conference call**

**Attendees:** Dotti Harness, Floodplain Administrator (FPA), City of Homer  
Matthew Johnson, STARR Discovery NFIP Specialist  
Bridget Belliveau, STARR Discovery GIS Coordinator  
James Patanio, STARR Coastal Expert

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*Hi Dotti - thanks for taking the time to talk with us today. As you already know, FEMA's new Discovery process involves learning as much as possible about selected watersheds so that we can help the local officials identify the best projects for FEMA funding and implementation. Our goal with the interviews is to confirm the data we've collected so far with you, to find out other information about your community's flood-related issues, and to answer any questions you have about Discovery as best as we can.*

*Did you have a chance to look over the Fact Sheet, map, and contacts list we sent? How did the data look to you?*

Yes. Julie emailed updates for demographics, the status of their hazard mitigation plan, the available Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) datasets, and the status of the communities Digital Flood Insurance Rate Map (DFIRM) conversion.

*As you see on the Fact Sheet, we found that you have been involved in several presidentially-declared disasters. Does your community have any flooding-related educational efforts or special programs to support folks who need flooding-related information or support?*

Dotti has Community Rating System (CRS) outreach pamphlets at the library and city hall. Also, when the DFIRM became effective, letters were mailed to citizens that were affected by the modifications to the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA).

*One indicator that an area may need a new study is a significant number of Letters of Map Amendment (LOMAs) along a flooding source. We found that you had Letters of Map Change (LOMCs) in the community; do you know if they were clumped together at all?*

Our data indicates four LOMCs. Dotti is only aware of one Letter of Map Revision (LOMR) in 1999: A large parcel on the end of the spit that now has 21 condos. Its location is noted.

*We also saw that there were a couple mitigation projects ... [Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, hillside water runoff diversion] and that the community contributed 25%. Are these the only mitigation projects that you know of? Using the reference map we sent, can you validate if they are in the correct locations (green crosses)?*

The green cross indicating the South Peninsula Hospital is in the correct location. The other green cross near the coast indicates the area of removal of dangerous trees near overhead power lines. Dotti indicated this is an ongoing process due to bark beetle infestation in the past that killed many trees.

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***Following-up on mitigation: Are there other projects that you think are needed in your community? Where? Why? Would the community be willing to share costs for such a project? Have you worked with the State to request FEMA funds for the projects?***

There are several non-developed private properties on the spit that are in the VE zone. Dotti would like to see these properties acquired by the city through mitigation funding. However, since no structures have been built on the properties and no damage has been done; the properties are ineligible for mitigation funds. This has been frustrating for her, since the owners are willing to sell.

***I saw that there were no repetitive loss properties in the community - properties that had experienced flood problems enough to require repeat claims. Is this correct?***

Correct.

***It looks like there have not been claims made outside of the mapped floodplain. Is this correct?***

Correct.

***We collected levee data from the National Levee Database. It reported that there are no levees in your community. Is that correct?***

No levees in the community. The flood risk is coastal.

***Following-up on levees: FEMA's requirement for levees is that communities provide documentation that the levee is compliant with the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 65.10, in order for the levee to be shown on new FIRMs as providing protection from the base flood. If this levee were determined to not be compliant with the requirements, what would be the impact on the residents?***

N/A

***We found that there are no tribal entities in the watershed, does that sound right to you?***

Correct.

***We did not find any Environmentally Sensitive Areas, like wetlands, or coastal areas requiring protection. Do you know of any that we may have missed?***

There are conservation districts along the coastline that impose restrictions for development. The area surrounding Beluga Lake is classified as wetland, in need of detailed study, that is in the General Commercial 2 zoning district.

***FEMA has a database of best available topographic data and that shows two LiDAR datasets. Julie just updated me on the LiDAR coverage. Just to clarify, G&O has a subset of the 2008 LiDAR for the spit; however you have more coverage but is mostly limited to the coast and possibly Beluga Lake. Do you know of any other topographic data collection projects in the area?***

There may be information the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) holds, which G&O likely acquired during preparation for the new spit study. Follow up with G&O.

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***FEMA has been documenting areas where new studies may be needed in a data system called Coordinate Needs Management Strategy (CNMS). On the map we sent to you, these mapping needs are shown in red and only Beluga Lake is identified. Is this consistent with your thoughts on new study needs?***

CNMS shows Beluga Lake as an area in need of a new detailed study, which Dotti fully supports. During the DFIRM conversion, this lake was mapped as Approximate Zone A and put several residents in the floodplain. Without an elevation to regulate to, this has been a challenge.

***Does the community have funding that they could contribute to a new study?***

Dotti was not aware of any funding for new studies; however they have topographic resources to contribute. Also, the Katchemak Bay Research Reserve (KBRR) may have additional resources to contribute.

***Are you aware of any existing studies, maybe completed by the community or developers or the DOT? IF YES, we need to have those studies in hand before the Discovery meeting. Can you send us either a pdf or hard copy?***

USACE may have additional elevations for the spit. Steve Baird of the KBRR, who's been in touch with Michael Parrish of G&O, may know of additional studies. Follow up with G&O and KBRR.

***As you probably know, FEMA requires a mitigation plan for any community to be eligible to receive disaster assistance (funding).***

Our records indicate your plan just expired, however Julie just informed me that an updated version was adopted July 2010, and is being reviewed by FEMA.

***Does your community have a GIS specialist? We have collected a lot of GIS data, but appreciate including local GIS layers. [If they have GIS data, ask about...] transportation layers, political boundaries, land use data, parcel data, building footprints, essential facility data, inundation areas from historic flooding, coastal data... [If they have data, they will likely tell you all about it]***

Julie Engebretsen is the GIS specialist. The City of Homer willingly distributes GIS data. Bridget will follow up with Julie to get additional local GIS data.

***Following-up on data: We would really appreciate being able to include those layers in our Discovery Map. Could you send it to me by... [today + 3 days]? If we don't have it before the meeting, we may not be able to use it.***

Julie agreed to send the GIS data.

***Do you know of any recent transportation projects, like replaced bridges or culverts, or highway reconstruction that were in the floodplain? Many times transportation projects are not quickly reflected in the flood maps. Can you tell us the location and date?***

None of which Dotti was aware.

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***Are there areas of rapid growth or development that may have affected the water runoff or were close to floodplains? Were LOMRs performed as part of the development? How about other land changes, like wildfires or landslides?***

No, there are not any areas of rapid growth or any growth other than typical.

***As part of Discovery, FEMA wants to support local officials in educating their residents about flood risk. We would like to ask a few questions about your community's communication strategies:***

***If new flood studies were performed for the high priority areas we discussed earlier, what is your sense of how the residents would receive the new flood study results and associated flood maps?***

People are more willing to accept accurate, definitive information used to regulate, rather than approximate methods.

***Because no two communities are alike and come in so many types and sizes, they all have unique outreach needs. We collected demographic data and found that ... [2% non-English speaker pop, 4% native pop, etc]. Does this seem correct to you? Have you found any particular type of outreach that works better to communicate risk to these folks?***

Communication to non English speaking individuals is not a huge issue in the City of Homer, but visual maps with an "X - You Are Here" will help. Sending mailings to people with a map is helpful.

***Each community has unique opportunities and challenges for outreach due to their local floodplain management programs and the local conditions that impact that community. Your community appears to have a unique flooding situation with the spit, although our records don't show any claims or repetitive losses. What is the current awareness level about this issue among your citizens? With FEMA's help, would you be willing to serve as a Subject Matter Expert on this topic?***

Dotti is willing to serve as the subject matter expert, since the residents will come in and ask her anyway. Number of insured policies on the spit are low due to no financing of the structures. Limited policies on spit are also due to structures being "low end", seasonal, and of a temporary nature (although they've been there a long time). Also, some structures are on leased land from the city.

***We sent a list of local contacts we would like to notify about any future projects. Could you take a look and let us know:***

***a. Is the name/contact info correct?***

The city planner's name was spelled incorrectly.

***b. Is any group or organization missing?***

No.

***c. Do you anticipate any concerns from anyone on the list? What would they be?***

No.

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**d. Do you know any of these people personally? How often do you meet/speak with them?**

She sees them on a daily basis.

**e. Does the Mayor/Executive's Public Affairs office have these groups on his/her mailing list?**

Yes, Walt Wrede (city manager) is a good point of contact.

**f. Are there regular meetings that these stakeholder hold where a status on this project might be appropriate to add to the agenda?**

Planning Department coordinates regular meetings with the planning commission and city council.

**g. If we provided information about the project to you/the Mayor/Executive, would your community be willing to send a letter inviting the community to a meeting or providing project update(s)? (you could get CRS points for outreach)**

Yes, there will be public notices about the meeting so anyone may come: Public notices will be made through the newspaper and with radio announcements.

***At the end of a Risk MAP project, FEMA will provide you with new data and risk assessment tools that will help you and your residents better understand and visualize your risks. With customizable outreach tools and templates provided by FEMA, would you and/or your community be willing to take a proactive approach in educating people who live and work in your community about their risk and the steps they can take to protect themselves?***

Certainly.

***Would you be willing to have a future call/meeting to discuss the community's capabilities and support resources that may be needed from FEMA?***

Sure.

***Who else should we include on that call that has knowledge about existing community outreach? Specifically, we would discuss things like website information and email lists; mailings to citizens and key stakeholders; press releases and media briefings; public meetings; and other outreach efforts.***

The planning department (including Dotti) coordinates outreach to the community.

***That's about all the questions that we have. Is there anything else you think we should know or include on our map?***

Dotti was curious of when the detailed study/elevations/mapping for the new spit study will be complete.

***Thank you so much for spending the time to talk with us.***