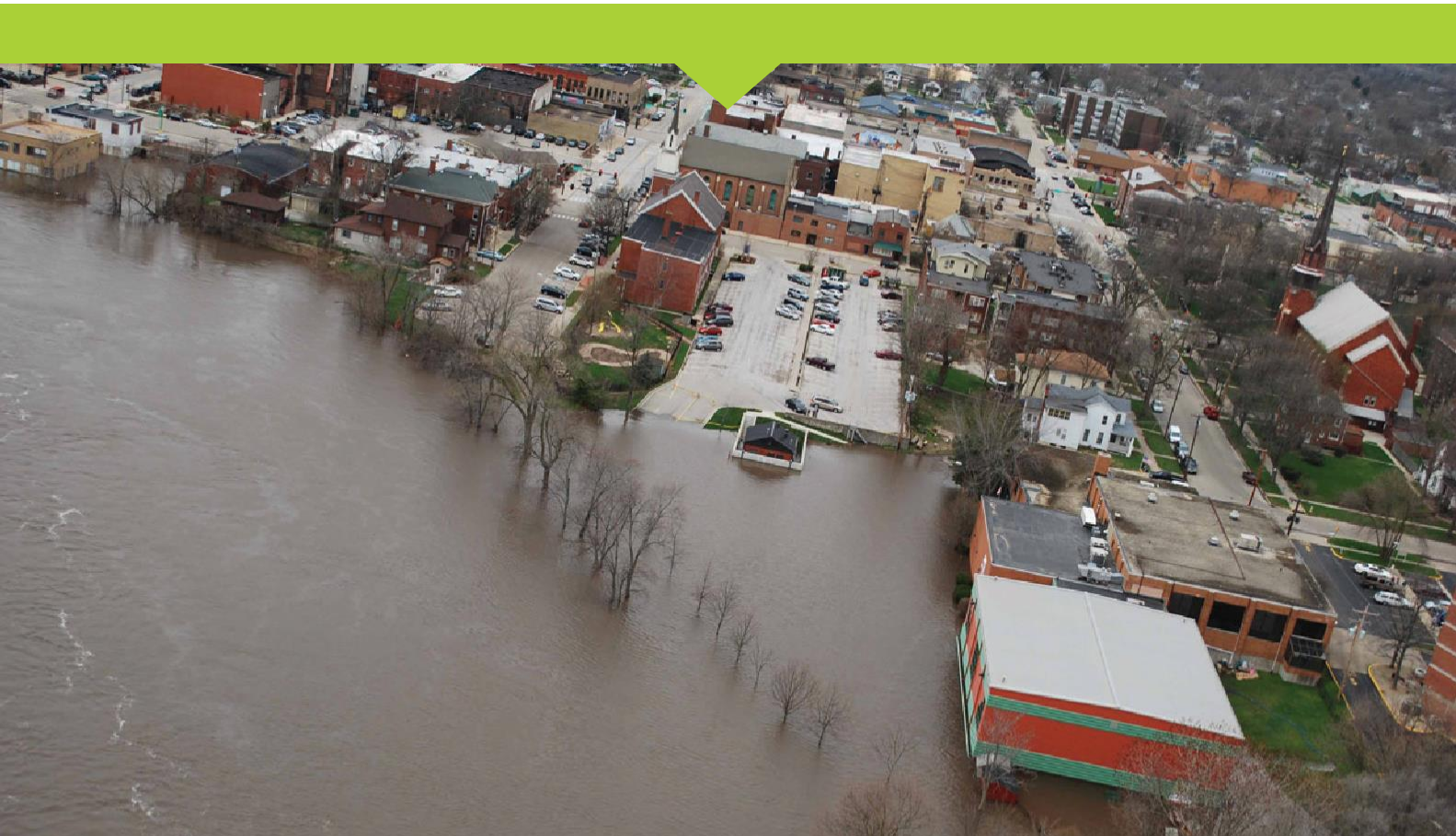


The City of Ottawa, Illinois Program for Public Information



2021



Prepared by
The City of Ottawa's
Flood Planning Commission

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Background



The City of Ottawa has been referred to as Louis Joliet's panoramic campground. Most often the city is called the "Friendly City" or the "Town of Two Rivers". Situated at the confluence of the Fox and the Illinois Rivers Ottawa has witnessed riverfront land use changes for more than one hundred years. This area at the confluence is the watershed for almost 12,000 square miles. The current development fosters a keen awareness of the "natural functions of the floodplain" with lessons learned from previous development and a forward proactive stance on sustainability.

The demolition of the flood-ravaged Central School and subsequent purchase of the property by the City has left Ottawa owning 21 acres of Illinois riverfront. Consequently, the City has included a master waterfront development project in its updated Comprehensive Plan. The waterfront plan includes a small harbor, a significant entertainment venue, much greenspace and beautiful botanical gardens, space for commercial retail and residential development and an area set aside for civic facility development. Implementation of this plan during the next few years will be the catalyst for dramatic economic growth and new job creation in downtown Ottawa.

The Fox River Buy-out Program and the resulting demolition and removal of dozens of houses and buildings gave the City of Ottawa the opportunity to develop a beautiful new, 15 acre park along the scenic Fox River. The greenspace nature of Fox River Park has been further enhanced by the removal of the asphalt and concrete which formed the now unneeded streets in this former residential neighborhood. The Fox River now flows naturally through this area during its frequent flood stages. A river walk for biking and walking now connects this new park with downtown Ottawa and the I&M canal tow path.

Ottawa has participated in the Community Rating System (CRS) since 2009. The CRS is part of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) which Ottawa joined in 1974. Ottawa is currently a Class 2 CRS community. As a class 2 community our residents in the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) enjoy a 40% discount on flood insurance. All other residents with flood insurance receive a 10% discount.

The Program for Public Information (PPI) is one element of the CRS program. However, it is a very important element, as this program has a far reaching and broad spectrum of information services that continues to evolve and be implemented.

An important part of the City of Ottawa's greatly strengthened flood management program has been the successful education of its citizens – especially those, of course, most likely to be impacted by frequent flooding episodes. The enhanced Ottawa flood management program has also reduced personal safety concerns along with the likelihood of property damage due to major flooding episodes.

Flood Management Commission

Since 2009 the City of Ottawa has formally had a Floodplain Management Commission. By order of the City Council the first Floodplain Commission was approved and created on September 15, 2009.

Careful consideration was given as volunteers were recruited to form this Commission. The membership represents residents, commercial stakeholders, lenders, insurance industry, emergency management, real estate and the City Floodplain Management team. To date this commission is most noted for the development of the City's Flood Threat Recognition & Response plan. This plan scored 190 points out of a possible 255 and is the highest scoring plan among all CRS communities in the state.

The Commission has established a Program for Public Information and continues to meet at twice annually to evaluate and discuss implementation status and strategies.

Bill Cairns	River Rescue
Bill Vogel	1st National Bank of Ottawa
Dave Erwin	Ottawa Public Works-Sewer and Water Superintendent
Jeff Hettrick	Chamber of Commerce
Brent Roalson	Ottawa Police Department
Connie Brooks	LaSalle County-Emergency Management Agency
Tom Duttlinger	City of Ottawa, City Engineer
Amanda Los	OSF-Saint Elizabeth Medical Center
Judie McConville	Coldwell Banker-The Real Estate Group
Steve Swett	American Red Cross
Mathew Stafford, CFM	City of Ottawa, Building Official, Floodplain Manager
Robb Hasty	Flood Insurance Agent
Tom Walsh	Resident
Scott Clinch	Ottawa Township High School
Andy Borkowski	Ottawa Fire Department
Jeremy Fowler	Heritage Harbor, Ottawa
Robert Rick	Resident
Troy Callaway	YMCA
Kevin Bressendorf	Computer Spa
Dave Noble, CFM	City of Ottawa, Economic Development Director

Members of Ottawa's Flood Commission are a group of professionals who are well trained and educated in their respective fields. All share a common vision of wanting to make Ottawa a better place. They have a clear understanding of the success of sharing solutions, the value of lessons learned and the benefit to the community of established best practices for floodplain management.

For the past 10 years this commission has helped establish higher regulatory standards, promoted resilient floodplain management and has set a leading example for other communities up and downstream.

Community's Public Information Needs

A Brief History of Ottawa:

The founding and establishment of Ottawa as a town evolved between 1823 and 1837. The confluence of the Fox and Illinois Rivers and the vision of Louis Joliet to develop a water connection between the Illinois River and Lake Michigan were important factors in establishing what is now the City of Ottawa. Ottawa is a Native American name derived from the Algonquin word "adawe", which meant "to trade". Although the community of Ottawa had been a county seat of government since 1831, the village apparently did not have any formal government. The construction of the Illinois Michigan Canal in 1836 and increased population must have caused the Ottawa residents on May 21, 1837 to file for a village charter which was approved by the state of Illinois on July 2, 1837. The early town records were burned in a fire in the office of Julius Avery, who was city clerk in 1858. It is not certain who was among the early town fathers. Ottawa was incorporated as a city in 1853.



The Ottawa Constitution, later the Ottawa Republican, started publication in Ottawa during 1844. It is now the lineal ancestor of The Times newspaper.

On February 14, 1853 the first Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company passenger train from Chicago arrived at Ottawa. Passenger service was continued twice a day to Chicago until about 1975.

On August 21, 1858, the first of seven debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas for U.S. Senate, was held in Washington Park before more than 10,000 people.

On September 24, 1881 the great fire of Ottawa occurred. Nearly all five blocks bounded by Jackson Street on the north, Clinton Street on the east, Main Street on the south, and the lateral canal on the west were destroyed. Damages were more than \$200,000. The Ottawa City Hall was destroyed as were all the records and the city jail.

The first electric railway system in Illinois started service in Ottawa on August 9, 1889. This was two years after the first such system in the United States began to operate in Richmond, Virginia. Ottawa became one of the pioneer cities to use the popular "street car". By the turn of the century, Ottawa was an active industrial center of Illinois.

1933 marked the completion of the Illinois Waterway linking the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. The waterway was developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a commercial navigation link between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River. The Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal linked Lake Michigan, the Des Plaines River and the Illinois River to the Mississippi River in an unbroken waterway of 327 miles.

Community's Public Information Needs



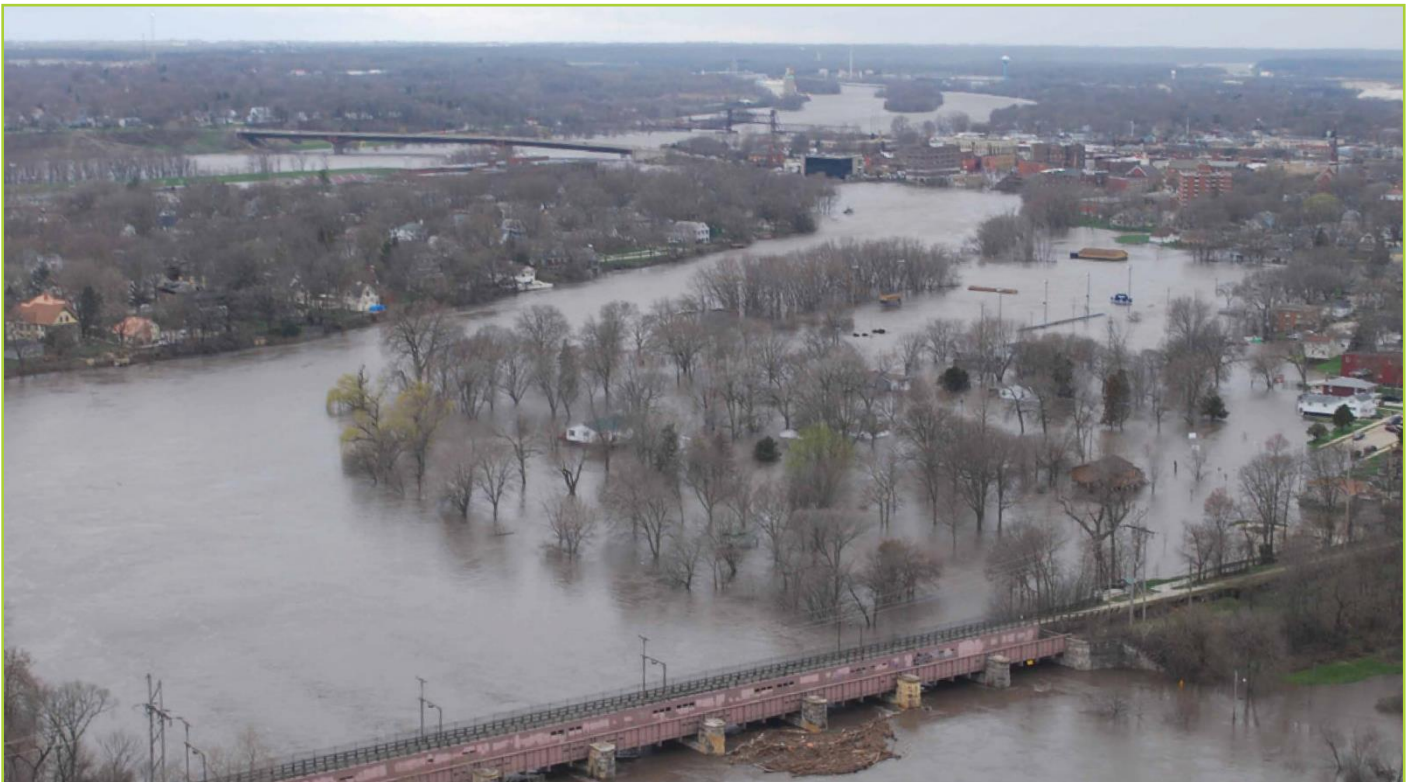
In January 1916 record flooding caused the not yet complete high school to flood. December 4th and 5th of 1982 the Main Street bridge was flooded and could not be used. The east side of the city was an island for 300 residents. Twenty-six homes were under water in the flats area where St. George Street, St Clair Street, Calumet, Ontario, Superior and Hudson Streets were all flooded. Fifty-six families were evacuated. Volunteers helped to build sandbag dikes to protect critical areas near Ottawa Township High School and the National Guard Armory. The sandbag dikes failed and the Armory was flooded with fourteen feet of water as was the high school cafeteria.

Today Ottawa has a population of about 18,500 with land area of 15.6 square miles. There are 101 miles of streets. There are 7008 residential/multi-family buildings and 859 commercial facilities for a total of 7867 buildings.

Flood Hazards

The City of Ottawa is located in North Central Illinois, LaSalle County, approximately 45 miles West of Joliet and 90 miles South of Rockford. The primary water course and sources of flooding are the Fox River and the Illinois River. A secondary and relatively inconsequential source of flooding is from the Goose Creek watershed which is only 6.58 square miles. The total fall for the Fox River from its source to Ottawa is 471 feet. The Fox River flows Southwest from its source, just North of Waukesha, Wisconsin, 187 miles to the mouth at the Illinois River in downtown Ottawa. There is a total of 2657 square miles of watershed in this basin. The water level of the Fox River is influenced more by the rainfall and runoff of Northeastern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin than by local rain events.

The Illinois River is influenced by Northeast Illinois, and Northwestern Indiana. The Kankakee, Iroquois, Des Plaines and Chicago Rivers are tributaries of the Illinois River upstream of Ottawa. A critical component of our flood hazard in Ottawa is that the watershed of the Fox and Illinois Rivers upstream of Ottawa is almost 12,000 square miles. As a result, the City could receive a minimal amount of rain, yet experience a severe flood event caused by runoff from the watershed.



The Illinois River flows West from its source at the confluence of the Kankakee and Des Plaines Rivers, through Ottawa from (mile mark 242.6) the Eastern boundaries to the Western city limits (mile mark 238.3).

Flood Hazards

Flood discharges during a 100 year flood event for the Goose Creek is 1,700 cubic feet per second (cfs), for the Fox River is 42,600 cfs and for the Illinois is 114,000 cfs.

The Illinois and Fox River flood characteristics have been studied by the Rock Island, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. A Flood Damage Reduction Project for the Illinois and Fox Rivers was completed by the USACE in February 2001. A levee was constructed by the USACE pursuant to this study on the Illinois and Fox Rivers. This levee lost its accreditation in March of 2010. The preliminary Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps, published in March 2010, increased the Base Flood Elevation on the Illinois and Fox Rivers approximately 1.5 feet. The levee provides protection for Ottawa High School, considered a critical facility, and a small section of the Fox River levee does not have the Flood Protection Elevation required for critical facilities. In 2019, the flood wall height was increased by 3.5 feet. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has published a preliminary Flood Insurance Study for Ottawa dated October 10, 2012. A Hydrologic and Hydraulic analyses was performed for the City of Ottawa for the Goose Creek in 1999.

Record floods have occurred in 1974, 1982, 1983, 1996, 1997, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. In April 2013 the all time record flood occurred approximately 1.5 feet higher than any recorded. The 1974, 1983, 1996, 2007, 2008 and 2013 floods all resulted in Federal Disaster declarations. In 2008 Central School was flooded and subsequently declared substantially damaged. This was perhaps the largest single flood loss recorded in the City of Ottawa with FEMA providing over 12 million dollars in relief.

During a flood event Green Street, a secondary means of egress for the East side of Ottawa, becomes impassible. The only other access to the East side is the Main Street bridge. During record flood events this bridge could become unusable, effectively isolating the East side. A grant has been awarded to elevate Green Street.

During record flood events residential flooding occurs on the East side (Illinois River) and an area known as the "Flats" (Fox River) at approximately cross section "D" as noted on FIRM panel #530 dated July 18, 2011. During these events the hospital can be threatened, however, they have recently constructed a flood protection wall which protects above the 500 year event. Ottawa High School is also threatened. The high school has a very good flood fighting plan which has been extremely effective, even preventing damage from the all time record flood of April 2013. The City of Ottawa's Waste Water Treatment Facility can also be threatened, but a new flood wall was completed around the facility in 2016. The YMCA is the only other commercial facility affected during major flood events.

During the winter months ice jams on the Fox River cause localized flooding from the mouth upstream to the OSF St. Elizabeth Medical Center.

During the flood of 2013 more than 500 basements received water from either overland flooding, sewer backup or sump pump failure. The Department of Community Development has recently completed a watershed study. The City also developed and adopted a Stormwater Ordinance in 2017. There are also plans to relocate a pump station susceptible to flooding located on Illinois Avenue.

Flood Insurance Assessment

The City of Ottawa has a total of 48 flood insurance policies in place. Five policies are commercial and 43 are residential. Total premiums are \$ 38,067 and in place coverage totals \$15,499,600. Since completion of the buyout program there are three repetitive loss properties on record.

The commission concluded that the City of Ottawa as a whole is grossly underinsured against flooding. After careful examination and discussion it was apparent to the commission that previous to this assessment, very few understood what was covered by homeowners insurance, flood insurance and sewer water backup insurance. The design and implementation of an aggressive outreach program to alert the community of the lack of flood insurance coverage is planned as part of this program. In that the community has dramatically reduced flood losses from riverine flooding, it is likely that the focus will be on urban/basement flooding which caused significant losses in the 2013 flood and continues with each major flood. Most commission members did not know that the City of Ottawa has a cost share program for homeowners for an overhead sewer system.

	Policies in Force	Premium	Insurance in Force
Single Family	41	\$18,344	\$10,505,600
2-4 Family	1	\$569	\$210,000
All Other Residential	1	\$498	\$580,000
Non Residential	5	\$18,656	\$4,204,000
Total	48	\$38,067	\$15,499,600
Condo	0	0	0
Non Condo	48	\$38,067	\$15,499,600
Total	48	\$38,067	\$15,499,600

Information on the above table was received from the Community Information System from the CRS specialist, dated November 2, 2020.

In that there are 24 residential buildings and 8 commercial facilities inside the Special Flood Hazard Area, it would appear that these properties are adequately insured.

Repetitive Loss Properties

There are three structures that are designated by FEMA as a Repetitive Loss Properties because they have had two or more flood insurance claims of more than \$1,000 during a rolling 10 year period. These properties are in the Illinois River Floodplain. In 2014, 9 properties, all considered repetitive loss properties were purchased and demolished. The land is deed restricted to green space. One more property that was considered repetitive loss was elevated in 2014 with Increased Cost of Compliance (ICC) funding.

Target Areas

Ottawa is somewhat divided into four sections. The North side has some relatively recent housing and subdivision development, none of which is inside the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA). The North side is subject to some flash flooding and basement flooding. There is also significant commercial development such as Pet Smart distribution and Kohl's distribution. The South side is an older section of town which the northern most boundaries are the Illinois River. The City's Waste Water Treatment Plant is located on the South side and is also in the SFHA. The West side is a long established, mostly residential neighborhood. The downtown is at the eastern most boundary of the West side. Many homes overlook the Illinois River from a bluff that is about 30 feet above the Illinois River. The River Rescue relocated their station out of the SFHA in 2019 and demolished the structure in the floodway in 2020. There is one other residential dwelling inside the SFHA on the West Side. The East side is a mix of older homes and some business. The high school, the hospital and the boat club are on the east side. Most of the flood prone properties in the city are located on the east side which is nearly encircled by the Fox and Illinois Rivers. During a high water event the East side can become isolated when the water level reaches the Main Street Bridge. At that time, Green Street (the only other exit from the East side) is impassable. Most single family dwellings inside the SFHA are located on the East Side.



Target Audiences

Residents living in the SFHA	Residents living behind levee system
Real Estate, Insurance and Lending Agents	Residents subject to Urban Flooding
Builders and Developers	Tourists and Recreationalists
All residents inside the City limits	School age children

- ▶ One obvious audience is the residents inside the Special Flood Hazard Area. Yearly mailings along with frequent on-site visits during flood events by the City's floodplain management currently target this audience.
- ▶ Another target audience identified by the Flood Commission are those residents living behind the High School levee. Most have never been told of the risk. The commission has developed literature aimed directly at those residents and sends out annually to property owners.
- ▶ Perhaps the least informed about floodplain regulations are the Real Estate agents and Insurance agents. Most lending institutions are aware of the NFIP insurance requirements but know little about actual floodplain regulations. Hence these three targets will be the focus of an outreach and education programs designed specifically for them.

The entire community is the focus of urban flood awareness and will be the focus of public outreach and education through open public meetings with follow up literature. The city has a yearly contractor meeting designed to update builders on current code requirements and significant changes. The meeting will be used to educate builders on the floodplain requirements along with literature prepared for other target audiences.

Ottawa is fast becoming a tourist destination and the commission has identified this audience as a target, especially for river safety. Historically, flooding has been responsible for a number of drownings, including several along the Fox and Illinois Rivers.

Children have been identified as a target market. Through discussion of current public information efforts it was noted that sending home a message with the children's school work would very likely be read and discussed by parents. The River Rescue sends a yearly safety message to schools.

Priority Messages

1. Know your flood hazard
2. Insure your property for your flood hazard
3. Protect people from the hazard
4. Protect your property from the hazard
5. Build responsibly
6. Protect natural floodplain functions
7. Practice river safety

Past Public Information Efforts

The City of Ottawa has adhered to CRS requirements for public outreach since 2009. The messages and printed material were shared with the Flood Commission to give context and reference for moving forward so that new ideas and approaches could be developed. Members participated in workshop exercises to identify what each entity was already doing for outreach and risk communication.

WHAT WE ARE DOING NOW TO INFORM AND OTHER PUBLIC INFORMATION EFFORTS

Organization	Project	Subject
City of Ottawa	Water Bill Inserts	Flood Information
City of Ottawa	Target Mailings	Flood Hazards
City of Ottawa	Websites/Social Media	Flood Resources
City of Ottawa	Cable TV	General Info
City of Ottawa	Websites/Social Media	General Info
Fire Department	Fire Safety	Digital Sign
Police Department	D.A.R.E.	Digital Sign
Police Department	NIXLE	Emergency Info
Police Department	Websites/Social Media	Community Info
River Rescue	Letter to Grade Schools	Water/Ice Safety
Illinois Valley Community College	Text Alerts	Weather/Road
Red Cross	Text Alerts/Radio	General Info
Chamber of Commerce	E-Blasts	General Interest info
Realtors	Newsletter	General Info
Banks	Bank Statement Insert	General Info
Hospital	Newsletter	General Info
NCICG	Email	All Hazard/Grants Info
High School	Website	General Info
High School	Digital Sign	General Info
Insurance	Webinar	General Info

Program for Public Information Tables

Target Audience	Message	Outcome	Proposed Project	Assignment	Schedule	Stakeholder
Residents & Businesses inside the SFHA	"Flood prone? Get Known!" Notify floodplain residents of the emergency notification services available to them with the City. Topic 1, Know your Flood Hazard	Have citizens sign up with Ottawa's Nixle system	Use the in place Nixle notification system and ottawafloods.org to keep citizens informed before, during & after a flood event. Solicit citizens to sign up for the service	Ottawa PD and Ottawa IT	Fall 2021-effort to advise residents of service and site. Water Bill/Media	City of Ottawa and Residents
Residents & Businesses inside the SFHA	"Ottawa residents receive up to a 25-40% discount on flood insurance premiums" Topic 2	Increase number of flood insurance Policies	Direct Mail to floodplain residents. Place information on ottawafloods.org	CRS Coordinator	Fall 2021	City of Ottawa and Residents
Residents subject to urban flooding	Standard Insurance does not cover sewer/water backup or river flooding. "Are you insured?" Topic 2	Increase number of flood insurance policies	Water bill insert to citizens Chamber of Commerce "e-blasts" to all businesses	CRS Coordinator Chamber of Commerce	2021-Minimally once per year. Inserts dependent on water department	Chamber of Commerce
Businesses and Residents who have reported basement flooding (567)	Sewer Ejector Program. Ottawa offers to reimburse 50% up to \$2000 for overhead sewer installs. "Don't sump it, pump it" Topic 4 Protect your property	Protect more homes from sewer backup and basement flooding	Water bill inserts. Website informational series	CRS Coordinator	2021-Minimally once per year. Inserts dependent on water department	City of Ottawa and Residents
All Residents	"Find Your River" Every property has its own river during a rain event Topic 4 Protect your property from the flood hazard	Identify and correct property conditions to lessen flood impacts	Public campaign showing how every property has its own river when it rains, i.e., downspouts, sidewalks, driveways, landscaping. Expanded flood information services.	City Engineer	Summer 2021	City of Ottawa and Residents
All property owners inside the corporate limits	If you control runoff, you can control basement seepage. Topic 4 Protect your property from the flood hazard	Lessen the impact of runoff. Improve water runoff quality	Rain Barrel Program. City sponsored rain barrel program	NCICG and City of Ottawa	Summer 2021	City of Ottawa and Residents
Property owners behind OTHS levee system	Levees do not eliminate flood risk Topic 3 Protect people from the flood hazard	Increase awareness of risk to homeowners behind levee	Target mailing to properties located behind the High School levee system	CRS Coordinator	Winter 2021	Ottawa Township High School and property owners behind levee
Real Estate Agents, Lending Institutions, Insurance Agencies	The property you just listed, mortgaged or insured is in the floodplain—do you know the rules? Topic 2 and Topic 3	Increase code compliance, lessen the number of floodplain violations	Open public meeting targeting real estate agents, lenders and insurance professionals	Building Official and City Engineer	Spring 2021- Every other year	Real Estate Agents, Lenders and Insurance Agencies
Real Estate Agents, Lending Institutions, Insurance Agencies	Do you know the real hazards of the floodplain? Topic 1, 2, and 3	Increase risk awareness	Mail Real Estate Agents, Lenders and Insurance Agents "Flood Information" document	CRS Coordinator	Fall 2021 Yearly thereafter	Real Estate Agents, Lenders and Insurance Agencies
Builders and Developers	Any remodel in the SFHA requires a permit. Know the regulations, sub-damage, improvement & ICC Topic 5 Build Responsibly	Decrease floodplain violations. Improve building safety	Contractors open public meeting/or direct mailing	Building Official and City Engineer	Spring 2021	Area Contractors
All target audiences	Varies (All 6 Topics)	Draw people to consume the new website and enhanced floodplain data	Launch a multi-media campaign informing all target audiences of the available data such as flood inundation mapping, early flood warnings, and flood response	Floodplain Management	Ongoing	City of Ottawa, Residents, Visitors of the Area
Builders and Developers	Do You Know Ottawa's Compensatory Storage Regulations? Topic 5 and Topic 6	Stop/Prevent any fill in the floodplain. Restore natural functions of FP	Annual Contractors open meetings and/or direct mailing	CRS Coordinator/ Building Official	Every other year	City of Ottawa, owners of floodplain property, contractors
All residents and tourists in the city limits	Know your flood hazard. This mark is the all-time record flood of 2013 Topic 1	Communicate Risk to all residents on riverine flooding	Ottawa's High Water Mark Initiative	CRS coordinator	Complete. Monitor Signs. Add as needed	City of Ottawa, Citizens, Tourists
All target audiences	When the flood waters are coming, go to www.ottawafloods.org for a link to our special inundation maps Topic 1	Inform people where the flooding will occur	Inundation maps created by the Illinois State Water Survey	City Engineer	Before a flood disseminate info in media outlets.	City of Ottawa, Media, Citizens

Program for Public Information Tables

Target Audience	Message	Outcome	Proposed Project	Assignment	Schedule	Stakeholder
Tourists & Recreationalists	"When the water is this high—Don't even try" Topic 1 Topic 7	Curtail recreational boating during a flood event	Informational signage in parks and near boat launches with water marks indicating flood base flood elevation and historic flood levels	Public Works	Complete-Monitor Signs	Tourists, residents, and Recreational Boaters
Flooded property owners and residents	Protect people from the flood hazard Topic 3	Maintain health throughout the clean-up period	Packet of flood information placed on doors in flooded neighborhoods. Place information on ottawafloods.org	Floodplain Management	After a flood	City and flooded residents

Annual Evaluation

The City of Ottawa's Flood Commission will meet annually, to evaluate the Plan and incorporate any needed revisions. The evaluation will cover:

- ▶ A review of the projects that were completed
- ▶ Progress towards the desired outcomes
- ▶ Recommendations regarding projects not completed
- ▶ Changes in the target audiences. Staff will draft an update as changes are made by the committee.

The revisions will be submitted to City Council for review and as part of Ottawa's annual recertification package to the Community Rating System.

