



PERTH-ANDOVER

Relocating homes and businesses to
avoid flooding

By Paul Kovacs

Source: Village of Perth-Andover

THE SCIENCE

A permanent and long-lasting solution to the risk of flood damage may include removal of structures at risk and dedication that the land will remain open space for public use. Some high-risk structures can be moved while others are demolished and rebuilt out of harm's way. The community ensures that the land will be used for walking trails and other recreational uses, or be allowed to revert to its natural state. Relocation preserves jobs in the community, and allows families to continue to use the same schools.

Some jurisdictions in Canada and many in the United States have adopted this strategy. Some involve expropriation of the highest risk properties. Many offer voluntary buyouts. Most communities in Canada, however, experienced difficulty in securing financial and other support for implementation. It is also challenging to build and maintain public support.

Since a major flood in 2012, the Village of Perth-Andover in New Brunswick has sought to relocate homes, businesses, and other properties at high risk of flooding. Progress in Perth-Andover illustrates the importance and power of local leadership.

THE TRIGGER

Flooding in March 2012 resulted in unprecedented loss and damage to homes, businesses, churches, and public buildings. More than 150 structures were damaged or destroyed in a village with a population of 1,600. Businesses were temporarily or permanently closed. Personal possessions were lost. The community experienced evacuations and severe disruption. Moreover, the community learned that it is possible that future water levels could exceed those experienced in 2012. A consensus emerged that the risk of recurring flooding must be confronted.

Community and public records reaching back to 1801 show that Perth-Andover experienced almost no flood events until 1976. After a hydro dam was constructed on the St. John River, the community experienced flooding in 1976, 1987, 1993 and, 2009, but these events resulted in relatively little damage and disruption when contrasted with the extent of the flooding in 2012. A number of studies completed immediately following the 2012 event established a new scientific and engineering consensus about flood risk in the community.

THE APPROACH

After the flooding in 2012, local leaders in Perth-Andover established a community consensus in support of a new long-term strategy to reduce the risk of loss and damage due to flooding. A central element of the strategy involved the relocation of homes, businesses, and other organizations at risk. Village leaders consistently and aggressively pressed for a comprehensive and permanent solution.

In 2016, the Village and the Province of New Brunswick published a joint redevelopment plan. The plan sets out a bold vision to develop a resilient, vibrant



Figure 5: The picture above shows the first home that was relocated in Perth-Andover. (Source: Village of Perth-Andover)

and safe community. The plan is based on new science and engineering analysis of the risk of flooding. It sets out a comprehensive plan of action that includes investments to locate the downtown business area at an elevation that could realistically withstand future flooding events, considering the impacts of climate change. The plan includes concept drawing, construction estimates and identification of land requirements.

THE OUTCOME

Most homes experiencing severe flood damage in Perth-Andover in 2012 were relocated or flood-proofed. Local leadership, timely risk analysis, provincial disaster assistance, and federal financial support were critical to supporting actions to significantly reduce the risk of future flood damage to homes, with a primary focus on relocating homes revealed to be at high risk. The devastating flood resulted in local, provincial, and federal collaboration to protect homeowners. Local and provincial leadership was critical to secure this important outcome.

The province has begun acting to develop critical roads in the community. In particular, they are working to ensure access to the hospital during periods of high water and to correct safety issues with the intersection of Route #105 and Route #109. Some road sections will be elevated and some properties will be bought out. There may be scope to raise the elevation of businesses located on roadways that will be elevated but that is not yet determined.

Provincial funding has been provided to construct a new building to house boilers and utilities above the flood level for the local hospital and to demolish the flooded portions of the hospital. Extensive renovations to the electrical and heating systems and lockers have been completed in the high school.

Absent at this time, however, is a mitigation program for businesses, churches, and other organizations affected by the 2012 flood, and funding to support a relocation plan to reduce the risk of future damage. Many businesses, churches, and other organizations in Perth-Andover are located in areas now identified as flood zones. Village leaders continue to press for a comprehensive flood strategy that protects homeowners, public buildings, and businesses. A lasting solution to manage the risk of severe flooding should include relocation of homes and other structures away from zones at risk.

There is, however, no commitment at this time for funding to relocate or protect non-residential structures at risk in Perth-Andover. The Village has indicated that it is willing to provide tax incentives for new buildings outside of the flood zone, a temporary reduction in utility costs for a relocated business, and assistance to cover the cost of moving power lines. The Village is seeking to secure land outside of the flood zone that could be used by businesses and other organizations. In brief, the Village has committed to do everything that it can to protect homes, businesses, and others in the community from the risk of severe flooding, with a focus on relocation away from harm, and it seeks additional support from the federal and provincial governments.

A WORD FROM PERTH-ANDOVER

When asked about her thoughts on the relocation process pursued in Perth-Andover, Marianne Tiessen Bell, the Mayor of the Village responded that “The ability of the business owners in our community to continue operating – providing goods and services and employing staff – depends on eliminating the risk of flooding once and for all. If flooding cannot be prevented, then the businesses need to move away from the river.” The community continues to call on the provincial and federal governments to provide the necessary and reasonable support to make this possible. Until then, businesses are in limbo, unable to confidently expand or upgrade their buildings while the threat of devastating flooding exists. Mayor Tiessen Bell went on to say that “Natural and man-made disasters occur across the country. We believe that the solution to Perth-Andover’s ice-jam flood risk – relocation grants, moving costs, forgivable or low-interest loans, rent subsidies, tax incentives, etc. – can serve as a model for other communities in Canada that suffer disasters.”