Program Update
Texas General Land Office
Community Development and Revitalization

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Community Development and Revitalization
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Abstract

1. Introduction

The Texas General Land Office (GLO) is the state's agent for US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grants for both Disaster Recovery and Disaster Mitigation. As part of these grants, we build infrastructure, housing and other programs to benefit low to moderate income disaster survivors. We are also allowed funds for conducting studies directed toward disaster recovery or mitigation. We are at, or close to, the midpoint for several of our grants so a progress report is in order.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this presentation are to update the progress of our current programs, our budget status and to provide a more focused presentation on studies. Especially the Regional Flood Studies and the TDIS system which will be integral to hardening the state so that our communities are more resilient to disaster effects.

3. Ongoing GLO Studies

Our Studies fall into two main categories: improving home design and technique for our housing programs, and assisting with community, regional and state level planning.

Our Housing Improvement studies focus on finding improved technologies to add value and resilience to the houses that we provide. All our individual housing recipients are Low to Moderate Income (LMI) and have had their home. destroyed or significantly damaged by a disaster. Many studies have shown that LMI families suffer disproportionally from disasters. If we are going to replace or repair their homes, we want to do that in a manner so that they are not severely victimized again. These studies focus on new, more resilient technologies and range from literature surveys to one for which we have just received proposals that focuses on the opportunity and maintenance costs of green technologies and destructive testing of new building techniques.

Our Planning Tools studies break down into two groups, assistance to local communities in funding their planning efforts and leveraging interagency cooperation and technology to develop an accurate model of disaster effects. We fund two categories of local studies. One is to assist in funding the development of Local Hazard Mitigation Plans which help communities identify and prioritize mitigation efforts and make them eligible for FEMA mitigation project funding programs. The other category is a first of its kind program that provides funds to develop city and county land use plans, codes, and education for Low to Moderate Income Families pointed at making a community more resilient.

On the regional planning and data focused studies we are working with numerous local, state, national, and university partners to gather disaster data, develop models to help in understanding how disasters happen, what can be done to mitigate them and to keep the data in a location where it accessible to researchers, communities, First Responders and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters. A key component of this is filling in the data and information gaps. For example, large parts of the state have no accurate flood mapping or even FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps, and thus have no information other than anecdotes to form a basis for disaster planning. This effort will lessen the cost of future studies, allow communities to make smarter decisions and lessen the effects of events. The Texas Disaster Information System is the keystone for this effort.

4. Lessons Learned So Far

The following are some things that we have learned so far:

- There is not a single resilient housing solution. All must be vetted by acceptability, local suitability and a cost benefit type analysis.

- LMI Populations lose ground economically in a disaster.

- Resilient housing is not just flood resistance, but also wildfire, extreme temperature, high wind and the often-overlooked maintainability.

- Large areas of the state (some of them urban) do not have flood mapping or other information on which to plan or make decisions.

- Disaster data is often "deleted" after the event is closed out

- FIRM maps are not a good predictor of flood risk

- Building to an adequate code helps

- Don't build without being sure the floor of the structure is at least 2 feet above Base Flood Elevation and grade.

- What happens upstream (impermeable cover, rain events) effects downstream. We must plan wholistically, not specifically.

- Lots of disaster data and more importantly, information is out there. The problem is it is often hard to find.

- The simple idea of storing data for future access was simplistic. But learning that and responding to the true complexity is good!!

- Multi-agency is possible and a desirable event although it requires an agreed upon mission and lots of coordination.