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The Village of Midlothian Adopts RainReady Plan to Restore Community Resilience

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MIDLOTHIAN, IL. – As cities across the nation are looking for ways to adapt to climate change, the Village of Midlothian on Wednesday became the first municipality to adopt the [RainReadySM Plan](#), a comprehensive blueprint for reducing flood risk.

“The village is committing to a long-term strategy that not only seeks to tackle flooding, but also revitalize the economy,” said Molly Oshun, RainReady Community Manager. “Flooding is nothing new to Midlothian -- the village has dealt with it since the 1920s. But in recent decades, residents have been hit with more frequent and severe floods, often putting entire blocks under water.”

In 2014, the community group Floodlothian Midlothian sought help managing Natalie Creek, a small tributary to the Cal Sag Channel with a terrible history of flooding the surrounding neighborhood. Floodlothian Midlothian found the Center for Neighborhood Technology’s RainReady Community program and we began working together to resolve the crisis.

Like many of its neighbors, Midlothian was hard hit by the 2009 recession and has been challenged to rebuild its economic base and sense of community pride ever since.

In partnership with village leaders, including an inspired Floodlothian Midlothian, the village is on a new course. More than \$1.3 million in outside funds have already been secured, with an additional \$8.3 million expected to be approved. Every step of the way, residents are leading the charge, driving forward proposals that bring flood relief and economic benefits.

“For the first time in the history of Midlothian’s existence, we have hope for a flood-free future,” said Helen Lekavich, head of Floodlothian Midlothian, who also pointed out that the effects of bringing the community together against urban flooding are paying off in more ways, including beautification and economic development. “This is something that’s going to uplift this community in many more ways than just dealing with flooding.”

RainReady Community began working in Midlothian in early 2015 in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In June, the program completed a [village-wide risk assessment](#) to determine the source and scope of flooding in the community. The survey revealed that flooding was chronic and widespread. In addition to the victims of Natalie Creek’s repeated overbanking – residents reported nine floods in 15 weeks in the summer of 2014 – residents suffered from backup in the sewer system and groundwater seepage. Our survey found high levels of anxiety in the village: 85 percent of respondents expressed concern about the impact of water-related problems on quality of life in the community. Flood damages were cited as a common cause of foreclosures and abandoned properties.

The Complete Street project on 147th Street/IL-83 is a prime example of RainReady's approach. The roadway is slated to be the first commercial corridor in the south suburbs to integrate flood relief, downtown revitalization, and improved biking and walking facilities. The street runs right through the heart of Midlothian, passing a Metra station, several schools, restaurants, businesses, and homes. Starting this month, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) will begin a corridor study through their Local Technical Assistance program. RainReady and CMAP will be working closely with village leaders and community members to determine the best mix of improvements for the community, which could include bike lanes, crosswalks, tree plantings, and pedestrian-scale lighting.

The transformation of Natalie Creek is another example of Midlothian's leadership in pursuing stormwater projects that bring broader benefit to the community. RainReady has been working with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD), the regional agency responsible for stormwater management, to transform the creek. Since meeting with the RainReady Midlothian team in the fall of 2014, MWRD has developed an \$8.3 million project to reduce flooding on Natalie Creek. Together with the National Park Service, South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association, and Trails for Illinois, RainReady is looking to leverage this investment to install a multi-use trail that would connect Midlothian to the Forest Preserve and the Cal-Sag Trail. The creek, which has been a hazard for Midlothian for decades, is being transformed into a beautiful community asset that helps to restore a sense of place in the village.

In 2016, CNT will be looking for opportunities to expand the Midlothian model into other communities across Chicagoland and the country that have been stricken by urban flooding.

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