

Buy-In for Buyouts: Buyout Best Practices and Their Implications for Hazard Mitigation and Climate Change Adaptation

Rohmer, Ashton

UNC Chapel Hill, Dept of City and Regional Planning

Large-scale buyouts following a disaster are an effective way to move people out of hazardous areas. In North Carolina, buyouts were used in both Charlotte–Mecklenburg and Kinston after severe flooding impacted hundreds of homes; however, the results of each buyout have been quite different. Charlotte–Mecklenburg has succeeded in implementing green infrastructure projects to help with storm water management, while Kinston has struggled to convert hundreds of acres of vacant land into green space. These two examples will provide ample opportunity to explore the pre-disaster planning process and the post-disaster implementation process, both of which are important considerations in a buyout program.

Using interviews with public officials involved in these land acquisition initiatives and a review of the academic literature, this project will analyze these two case studies to determine what lessons can be drawn and applied to both the pre-disaster planning process and the post-disaster implementation process. The research will eventually be integrated into a disaster recovery exercise that will serve as a guide to other municipalities as they plan for land use changes following a disaster.

As climate change influences the severity and frequency of storms, towns and municipalities must be prepared to not only mitigate their impacts through thoughtful land acquisition programs, but also must have a clear plan for how the land will be used after the buyouts have been completed so as to further climate change adaptation goals. This analysis will be informative both to rural areas where a large-scale buyout might be most appropriate, and to more dense urban areas where smaller-scale buyouts may be the best option, particularly as the urban heat island effect intensifies and cities look for more green space as a mitigation measure. Similarly, while this will be particularly relevant to communities within North Carolina, the lessons learned can be applied to localities across the globe as they face the challenges associated with a changing climate.