



# Guidance for Maintenance of Buyout Lots

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for the maintenance of property acquired through the Harris County Flood Control District's (District) voluntary buyout program. Besides being a permanent solution to flooding hazards, these property acquisitions achieve District objectives such as protecting critical habitat, providing local recreational opportunities, providing stormwater storage and enhancing the natural or cultural resources of the area.

These guidelines have been established to balance the reality of non-contiguous property ownership through the voluntary home buyout program, and the increasing maintenance costs of these vacant properties, with the need for the District to be good stewards of the land and good neighbors to adjacent property owners and established local communities by maintaining its property to established standards.

## BACKGROUND

The purpose of the District's voluntary home buyout program is to mitigate flooding hazards by offering homeowners, who are located within documented buyout areas of interest, the opportunity to sell their flood-prone residences and relocate to higher ground. For more information on the District's buyout program please see "[Harris County Flood Control District Voluntary Buyout Guidance](#)". Over 75 percent of the District buyouts use FEMA funding which have federal restrictions for their future use and is governed by the Stafford Act Section 2.3.13.2.2.2 and the requirements of 44 CFR Part 80.

Participation in the voluntary buyout program is voluntary, so some property owners choose not to participate. As a result, HCFCD may own single lots in the interior of a subdivision, leading to a checkerboard effect. The checkerboard effect increases the cost of maintenance for HCFCD, and sometimes leads to complaints from neighbors. These complaints include inadequate maintenance, dumping, and illegal activity on the property. In order to address maintenance costs and safety concerns, HCFCD proposes the following future use plan for buyout properties.

## MAINTENANCE OF BUYOUT PROPERTIES

After buyout properties are purchased and cleared of all structures, the land is turned over to HCFCD's Facilities Maintenance Department for maintenance. The maintenance and future use of the land will vary based on HCFCD's strategic plan for each area. Limited development is allowed and is generally restricted to only those non-insurable facilities that would not impede stormwater during flood events.



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The maintenance of the buyout properties is based upon the property's proximity to occupied structures, and the type of land use in the immediate area and will take into consideration the maintenance type of the adjacent channel. Additional consideration will be given to the potential flood damage reduction opportunities or needs in the area and financial constraints. Regardless of the defined maintenance type of the properties in the buy-out program, each property will have periodic removal of debris from illegal dumping and removal of hazardous trees on an as needed basis.

The suggested uses include these categories:

1. **Return to Nature Area**: A return to nature area would not be regularly maintained by HCFCD. Instead, after the structures are demolished, the naturally occurring forest would be allowed to reestablish in the area including the area along the bayous and tributaries, which could aid in stormwater quality, provide bio-retention benefits and ecological benefits to the local area. This category would be appropriate when HCFCD's voluntary buyout property is located along a bayou or tributary and not adjacent to an occupied structure, as well as when the objective is to protect critical habitat. While return to nature areas are not maintained on a regular basis. Buy-out lots in these areas are monitored for invasive species and under brushed as needed to maintain a healthy forest of mixed, native tree and shrub species.
2. **Minimal Maintenance Area**: A minimal maintenance area would be mowed periodically by HCFCD. After demolition, the lot will be mowed as needed to maintain access and provide visual clearance for the safety of residents that continue to live in the area. If there are no maintenance agreements for lots within a neighborhood, these lots should receive minimal maintenance, given their proximity to occupied structures. Minimal maintenance may include mowing up to three times per year and underbrush removal to control invasive species. Some minimal maintenance areas may have portions of lots that are mowed, primarily the front of the lots, for safety and aesthetic purposes. This category would be appropriate in more rural areas, areas that do not have strict deed restrictions regarding property aesthetics or areas with lots adjacent to HCFCD maintained channels.
3. **Routine Maintenance Area**: A routine maintenance area would be used in subdivisions with deed restrictions and minimum maintenance requirements on properties where HCFCD does not have maintenance agreements with others. These areas would be maintained by HCFCD in a manner that exceeds the Minimal Maintenance Areas and will include monthly mowing during the growing season, debris removal as needed, and an annual pruning of any trees or shrubs



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growing on the lot. This category would be appropriate in urban areas or areas that do have strict deed restrictions regarding property aesthetics.

4. **Agreements with Adjacent Property Owners or Other Third Parties:**

Neighboring property owners would enter into maintenance agreements for HCFCD owned buyout properties. Neighboring property owners would be responsible for maintaining the property, including mowing, but they would not be allowed to construct structures on the buyout lot. This category would be appropriate for subdivisions where HCFCD's ownership of lots is few and not contiguous, like a checkerboard, to help reduce the need for routine maintenance by HCFCD within these subdivisions.

For status of mowing for these buyout properties please see "[Interactive Mowing Schedule Map](#)" on the HCFCD website.