

# MAPPING THE RISK

## FLOOD MAP MODERNIZATION



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### 1. Why did Plymouth get new Flood Insurance Rate Maps?

Flood hazard maps, also known as Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs), are important tools in the effort to protect property and public safety in Plymouth. They indicate the risk for flooding throughout the community. However, the current FIRMS are out of date, and do not accurately reflect current risk in coastal areas. The result of this FIRM update is a better picture of the coastal areas most likely to be impacted by flooding, and a better foundation from which to make key decisions.

### 2. Who is responsible for updating FIRMs?

Plymouth's FIRM update project was a joint effort. FEMA updated the FIRMs in cooperation with the Town of Plymouth, the Massachusetts Flood Hazard Management Program, and private sector partners.

### 3. What is a Flood?

FIRMs are used to determine the flood risk. The low- and moderate-risk zones are represented on the maps by the letter "X" or an "X" that is shaded. The inland high-risk zones will be labeled with designations such as "A", "AE", or "AO", and coastal high-risk zones that have additional risk from storm surge and wave action will be labeled "VE".

### 4. What are the benefits of the new FIRMs?

The new FIRMs will benefit numerous groups of people in different ways:

- § Community planners and local officials will gain a greater understanding of the coastal flood hazards and risks that affect and can therefore improve local planning activities.
- § Builders and developers will have access to more detailed information for making decisions on where to build and how construction can affect local flood hazard areas.
- § Insurance agents, insurance companies, and lending institutions will have access to more accurate flood risk data in coastal areas.
- § Home and business owners will have the ability to make better financial decisions about protecting their properties.

### 5. What is a floodplain and how do I determine if my property is located in this area?

A floodplain is the part of the land where water collects, pools, and flows during the course of natural events. Such areas are classified as Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA), and are located in a 100-year flood zone. The term "100-year flood" is a little confusing. It is the flood elevation that has a 1- percent chance of being equaled or exceeded

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each year; it is not the flood that will occur once every 100 years. The likelihood of a flood occurring within a 100-year stretch of time is very, very high, but there's no way to predict when the next flood will occur - or the one after that. The new FIRMs indicate the floodplain as a "high-risk" area, officially classified as an AE, A, or AO zone. Low- and moderate-risk areas will be designated as X zones and shaded X zones on the new maps.

#### 6. How do the new FIRMs affect me?

There are some properties that were not affected - their risk remains the same. Other properties are now mapped into a higher-risk area and/or show a new Base Flood Elevation\*. Some properties were mapped into a lower-risk area than before.

#### 7. What happens if I moved from a low- or moderate-risk area to a high-risk area?

If the new FIRMs indicate the building on your property is now at a higher risk for flooding, you will be required to purchase a flood policy if you carry a mortgage from a federally regulated lender. If you do not have a mortgage, it is still recommended that you purchase flood insurance. Over the life of a 30-year loan, there is about a 3 times greater chance of having a flood in your home than having a fire\*. And most homeowners insurance policies do not provide coverage for damage due to flooding.

If your building is now shown in a high-risk area, there are lower-cost options available through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) "grandfathering" rule.

#### 8. What happens if I moved from a high-risk to a low- or moderate-risk area?

When a building moves to a low- or moderate-risk area, there is no longer a federally mandated requirement to purchase flood insurance. However, the risk has only been reduced, *not removed*. Flood insurance is still recommended.

\* Base Flood Elevation: The height of the base flood—or area of land that has a 1 percent chance of flooding in a given year—in feet, in relation to the North American Vertical Datum of 1988.

\* FEMA - 2005 National Statistic

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## FLOOD MAP MODERNIZATION



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Now that the maps have been adopted, you may be eligible for a lower-cost Preferred-Risk Policy (PRP). Through your insurance agent, it is simple to submit a PRP application and insured-signed conversion form to avoid any gaps in your flood coverage.

#### 9. How might the new FIRMs affect me financially?

The new maps became effective on December 19, 2006, if your structure was mapped into a high-risk area and you have a mortgage with a federally-regulated lender, you will need to purchase flood insurance. If your property was mapped into a low-or moderate-risk area, you are not required to purchase or maintain insurance, but are strongly encouraged to do so. The cost of properly protecting your home and contents from flood damage is far less expensive than the cost to repair or replace it after a flood has occurred.

#### 10. What is the Grandfathering Rule and how can it help me?

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) has “grandfathering” rules to recognize policyholders who have built in compliance with the flood map in place at the time of construction or who maintain continuous coverage. These rules allow such policyholders to benefit in the premium rating for their building. However, property owners should always use the new map if it will provide you with a more favorable premium.

##### Renewal of an Existing Policy

When determining the premium you will pay for flood insurance, an insurance agent will rate your flood insurance policy based on the flood map that is in effect on the date you purchase your policy. Flood insurance policies may then be renewed and still be rated based on the flood map in effect when the policy was initially rated as long as the flood insurance coverage is continuous and the building has not been altered in a manner that would remove this benefit. You may even qualify for the lower-cost Preferred Risk Policy for the first year, which provides both building and contents coverage at significant savings. To help maintain this grandfathering benefit for the next owner, you may transfer the policy to them at the time of sale.

##### Built in Compliance

The NFIP will honor a Grandfather rule for buildings constructed after the first flood map for the community became effective if:

- 1) the building was built in compliance with the flood map in effect at the time of construction; and
- 2) If the building has not been substantially damaged or altered.

Under this Grandfather rule, the property owner must provide proper documentation to the insurance company.

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- If you wish to keep the zone designation in effect when the structure was built, you must provide a copy of the flood map effective at the time of construction showing where the structure is located or present a letter from a community official verifying this information.
- In general, for buildings constructed in high-risk zones after the community's first flood map was adopted, your rates are based upon the difference between the flood map's Base Flood Elevation (BFE) and your building's elevation. If there is a change in the BFE and keeping the BFE that existed when the structure was first built gives you a better rate, you must provide the agent with an elevation certificate and a copy of the flood map effective at the time of construction. A letter from a community official verifying this information is also acceptable.