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Detroit neighborhood, Hamtramck win combined \$20 million for sewer upgrades

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By Sarah Rahal

Detroit's Jefferson Chalmers neighborhood and Hamtramck were awarded a combined \$20 million in federal funding to install new sewer mains and relief combined sewers, the Federal Emergency Management Agency announced this week.

New sewer mains are expected to protect more than 600 Jefferson Chalmers homes from flooding, and combined sewers will protect an estimated 24,000 residents, according to a statement from FEMA.

The lower east side Detroit neighborhood is flood-prone and has seen significant damage since the 1950s, the release from FEMA stated. It was awarded \$11.2 million to replace 18,800 feet of combined sewer mains in the neighborhood, increasing the level of service to meet a 10-year, one-hour storm event. The project will also upsize existing sewer mains or install new relief sewers to convey an equivalent flow and reduce the risk of flooding.

After historic summer flooding in 2021, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department received 29,636 claims, totaling \$180.8 million, according to FEMA.

Hamtramck also has frequent basement and street-level flooding due to an undersized sewer system which can't support current residents, according to FEMA. The Hamtramck Phase 1B Relief Sewer Project is a continuation of a sewer relief project installed in 2016.

The upgraded drainage will collect combined sewage from specific trunk sewers. It will then transport the overflows to the existing Phase 1A relief sewer. The Hamtramck project also includes the installation of an overflow structure and a relief sewer to alleviate surcharging issues.

The two projects were selected as part of a national competition for funding from the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities fund. FEMA selected 124 projects across 115 communities in 38 states, it announced.

The selections total \$1.8 billion for resilience projects, the release from FEMA said.

The projects are funded through President Joe Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which provided FEMA with nearly \$7 billion to help communities reduce their vulnerability to flood, hurricanes, drought, wildfires, extreme heat and other climate-fueled hazards.

The Detroit project builds on the existing Jefferson-Chalmers Water Project, a community-driven initiative to find solutions to the interconnected water resource management challenges in the neighborhood, which is surrounded by natural and enclosed water assets. The community is bordered by Fox Creek/Alter Road to the east, the Conner Creek/Clairpointe Avenue to the west and the Detroit River to the south.

The project is structured around three goals: keep sewage out of basements and canals, stormwater out of the sewer system and the Great Lakes out of the neighborhood.

On June 24, 2021, the Jefferson-Chalmers Water Project published "Toward Better Water Resource Management in the Jefferson-Chalmers Community," a 72-page report by resident Jay C. Juergensen. It was published just before the disastrous summer 2021 storms that caused significant surface flooding and basement backups throughout southeast Michigan.

The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department said in May it was seeking approval for a \$3.4 million initiative to create bioretention areas in the city to reduce basement backups and street flooding that it hopes to complete by the end of 2024.

Millions of Americans in communities big and small feel the effects of climate change each year from drought, extreme heat, wildfires and floods, said Mitch Landrieu, senior adviser to the President and White House infrastructure coordinator.

"President Biden's Investing in America agenda provides the largest investment in the resilience of physical and natural systems in American history. These projects will be a lifeline for many communities as we build a stronger, more resilient America," Landrieu said in a statement.

Some other selected community projects include strengthening the electrical grid in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, upgrading pipelines in the Central Utah Water Conservancy District to withstand seismic activity and making storm drainage improvements in Greenville, North Carolina.

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