

## REBUILD VERNONIA

In December 2007, a devastating flood hit the city of Vernonia. About 340 houses were damaged which is about one-third of the houses in the city. Approximately 100 houses were substantially damaged according to FEMA standards and require major reconstruction. The elementary school, middle school, and high school were all flooded, with the high school receiving so much damage that it has since been demolished. In the face of this disaster, the community has embarked on an ambitious program called *Rebuild Vernonia*. Over the next five years, we will make some major, positive changes to our community.

### ► Rebuild Schools – The Centerpiece Project

**1. Replace Elementary School, Middle School, and High School.** The centerpiece of *Rebuild Vernonia* is the replacement of the elementary school, middle school, and the high school at a location outside of the floodplain. The components of this project include: a) construction of a new compact school campus built as “green” as possible; b) extension of sewer and water lines to serve the new schools; c) reconstruction of Texas and Missouri Streets (curbs, gutters, sidewalks, bike paths, and travel lanes) to serve the new campus; and d) acquire additional services that support these changes. Grants are needed to complete the work. A school bond election will likely be held in November, 2009 to provide a local share.

### ► Community Development

**2. Construct New Wastewater Management Facility.** The federal Corps of Engineers and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality want the city to move its current wastewater treatment facility (a three-cell lagoon system) out of the floodplain. An update to the city’s Wastewater Facilities Plan is underway. The Facilities Plan will help the community select the wastewater system for the future. Sustainability and energy-efficiency will be key criteria in selecting a new system. Federal and State grants are necessary to make the wastewater system affordable to community residents.

**3. Begin Downtown Urban Renewal and Main Street Program.** This component involves completion of an urban renewal plan for revitalizing downtown Vernonia and then implementation of projects identified in the plan. Implementation of a Main Street Program will provide the necessary skills to assist in the renewal of the downtown area. Federal, State, and City funds are needed to fund the necessary work.

**4. Complete Street Improvements.** Streets throughout the city are in need of substantial work. Some streets need complete reconstruction, some need repaving, and some need major maintenance work. Curbs and gutters and sidewalk work is also needed. Federal, State, and City funds are needed to fund the necessary work.

**5. Build Community Service Center.** The Providence Health Clinic, Columbia Community Mental Health, the pharmacy, the Vernonia Cares community food bank, and the Senior Center were all flooded in December 2007. The community would like to construct a new multipurpose complex which can house all of these services. The State of Oregon has agreed to transfer surplus land to the city. Consisting of about one-acre, the site is at the south entrance to the city immediately fronting on Highway 47. Other uses suggested for the site include new housing for senior citizens, a new Emergency Operations Center/emergency

shelter, and a substation for the Fire District. All buildings will be designed to be sustainable and energy-efficient, and be a model for other new buildings in the city. This site is ideal and will create a new high-value gateway to the city. The city seeks grants and below market rate loans from Federal and State sources.

**6. Construct Community Recycling and Reuse Center.** While the community is provided with typical recycling services provided through Waste Management, Inc., we are in need of a true community recycling center to aggressively promote recycling, composting, and reuse opportunities. It is proposed that a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation be formed to advocate for recycling and reuse and to assist the existing private recycling service.

#### ► **Flood Recovery and Prevention**

**7. Elevate and Rehabilitate Flood-Damaged Structures.** As a part of flood recovery, a substantial number of home and business owners need to rehabilitate their houses and business buildings. This work will include complete weatherization to reduce future energy use and costs and to integrate onsite storm management and other green development features in the rehab work. Grants and low-interest, long-term loans are needed.

**8. Flood Recovery for West Oregon Electric Cooperative (WOEC).** Major substations and the headquarters building for WOEC were badly flooded in December 2007. There is a need to relocate the main Vernonia Substation and the headquarters facilities out of the floodplain. Flood waters have twice shorted out the substation and put three to four feet of water into their buildings. Another main project is under-grounding a transmission line that storms and trees have devastated numerous times and has currently been out of service since the 2006 wind storm. There is also a need to upgrade the electrical grid and substations to handle the technological advances and energy uses of the future. WOEC needs to design and implement a Smart Grid system, for everything from electric cars to green technologies to energy efficiencies.

**9. Reduce Future Flooding in Vernonia.** The US Army Corps of Engineers has been asked to provide funding for a flood modeling study of the Nehalem River and Rock Creek watersheds. Once the work is done, the model will be able to do flood prevention simulation and help define projects that can reduce future flooding. Federal funds will be requested to assist with the financing of these projects.

#### ► **Economic Development**

**10. Provide Broadband Internet Services.** Only the area near downtown of Vernonia and along Highway 47 has broadband internet coverage. Most of the city and the rural area surrounding the city are without coverage. Broadband internet coverage will enhance the city's opportunities for economic development. A feasibility study is needed.

**11. Develop Light Industrial Site—Create Family-Wage Jobs.** There is a 52-acre parcel zoned Light Industrial located at the northeast corner of the city. The site has excellent highway access, is located outside the floodplain, and has a 36 inch natural gas main adjacent to it. The city would like to assist the landowner with site preparation work, construction of the appropriate utilities and infrastructure to serve the site, and then work with the State of Oregon to market the site. Federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) funds have been requested to analyze the site and determine how it can be divided and then developed to encourage creation of family wage jobs. Federal and State funds are needed to serve the site with roads and necessary utilities.