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## Detroit fights flood plain label

Change may bring costly insurance on homes, businesses

By R.J. King / *The Detroit News*

**DETROIT** -- Federal officials are poised to declare a large swath of land on Detroit's east side a flood plain, which could require costly infrastructure upgrades, make new development more costly and force existing homeowners and businesses to buy costly insurance.

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Detroit officials say they have time to avert the designation. They are formulating a plan to handle drainage and other consequences of a flood in the area, bounded roughly by the Detroit River, Chene, Kercheval and Alter.

The sector contains hundreds of single-family homes, apartment complexes, businesses, marinas and parks.

Federal and state agencies plan to work with Detroit officials to minimize the cost of higher sea walls, levees, better drains and other improvements.

The improvements could eliminate the need for added insurance for businesses and consumers, which could total \$2,800 per year on average for a single-family home, said city planning officials.

In recent years, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, has been stepping up preventative measures in potential flood areas to help ward off millions of dollars in potential damages. The last large flood in the Detroit area under study was 1973.

"The goal of the flood plain effort is to prevent damages from a large flood which could occur every 100 years," said Russ Harding, director of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality in Lansing. "There is a 1 percent chance that a flood will happen in that area at any given time,

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but it would most likely occur in the spring as the ice melts."

By year's end, FEMA is expected to determine that Detroit needs to take preventative steps to avoid federal mandates on flood protection in the designated sector. Other sections of the tri-county area could fall under the same scrutiny over the next five years, said Nanette Noorbakhsh, hydrologist for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Detroit.

"The Grosse Pointe communities faced the same flood plain issue (during the 1980s) and they went ahead and installed a levee to correct the problem," Noorbakhsh said. "A lot of areas along the Detroit River have high banks, but it's when you get to canals and low areas that a problem could occur."

Mayor Dennis Archer said the city is currently gathering information in the affected area, and plans to meet with federal and state officials next month to determine a remedy. He plans to have a program in place that would alleviate a large flood in the area before he leaves office at the end of the year.

"We do not want the potential flood plain issue to interfere with the continued growth and development of the city," Archer said. "My plan is to develop a course of action and have it approved by all the necessary parties by the time I leave office. We do not want to be on any flood plain map."

If the city fails to correct the potential problems and the area is designated a flood plain, it could jeopardize several high-profile projects, including 410 new homes scheduled to be built by Bloomfield Hill-based Pulte Homes Inc. east of Water Works Park. Other projects in the works include two new shopping centers, a marina and loft developments.

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