

Demolition of flooded homes explained

by Jamie Jones, Housing Rehabilitation and Demolitions Specialist, Community Action Team, Inc

When someone says “Demos”, my first thought is a building being imploded from the inside out. The research I’ve done on flooded properties elsewhere showed homes being knocked over with a wrecking ball or an excavator, while a truck sprayed water to keep the dust down during the entire project. I was a bit disheartened with the process. Thankfully, to Custom Excavating and Trails End Recovery “demo” means deconstruction and recovery of materials. So one might wonder, what is involved in deconstructing a building?

Once you enter into this type of contract, the first step is to get the permits. Many people think that a permit is unnecessary but, yes, you do need a building permit to tear a house down. For some very good reasons. Most people don’t realize that permits are protection for the owner and the contractor, and are important in removing a building. This is particularly true with the utilities serving the building. All utilities must be disconnected from the property before working on the building. Also required is a flood plain permit. Our flood ordinance requires that the city review anything built or demolished in the floodplain.

The homes to be demolished are also tested for lead and asbestos. While this is usually a must in older homes, we’re required by our grant funders to make sure this is done. One example illustrating why this is required is the house that was painted with lead-based paint within the last ten years, 30 years after it was banned. Many of these older homes also have asbestos ceilings and asbestos tiles. The hazards in these homes are mitigated separately by a trained asbestos removal team before the contractor can remove anything.

During this time the various utility companies are also contacted. WOEC cuts the lines at the boxes, below ground or at the weather heads, and then removes the meters. Public Works caps the water pipes

and removes the meter. The gas company caps their line at the main junction and at the structure before the meter is removed. At this point, the contractor can pull up any pipes that are still in the ground.

Now that it’s safe to knock things around, the contractor tears out the sheetrock. This goes in a separate bin, is taken back to the contractor’s yard and sorted for nails. The nails are later combined with the other metals and the sheetrock will be blended with recycled concrete. Insulation is removed and put in a separate bin. Sometimes insulation can be recycled, but most of these buildings have been sitting since the flood, so the insulation is dirty, moldy and has become home to many small critters.

As they work on the walls and studs, all metals – copper, iron, aluminum, sheet metal, and wire – are sorted into bins supplied by Metro Metals. Plastic-type piping – water, waste and drain – go in the bin and are split between Custom Excavating and Waste Management. Any carpet remaining on the ground floor will be thrown away. Unfortunately so far, no carpet found on the second floor has been in good enough shape to reuse. Anything that can be reused will be available for a small cost and/or donated to local residents. These items include: windows and doors, wood floors and paneling, appliances, cabinets, ceiling fans, brick/tile veneers, fireplace mantels, and sinks.

Once the inside has been gutted, the contractor will remove the windows and doors on the first level. Second level windows are also available if requested ahead of time. Windows and doors have been made available to the public at no cost. If unclaimed, the vinyl windows are thrown away, vinyl is not recyclable. The metal from the windows will go into the metal bins and the wood to the wood pile. Any hardware not claimed will also go to the metal bins. Depending on what type of siding is on the home, residents have asked to salvage the siding, however, not all siding is recyclable. If the siding has lead based paint, it must be removed in a specific

manner and sent to Waste Management, where they will dispose of it properly.

Next, all the roofing materials are removed. Most roofs, so far, have been composite shingles. This material is recycled at the contractor’s yard, sorted to remove nails, then ground up and blended with concrete. Metal roofs will be salvaged through Metro Metals. Wood roofs will go into the wood reserve on the mill site pad.

When the structure is down to the wood studs, the demolition starts. Custom Excavating tries to knock the structure down in a way that allows most beams to be preserved. All the wood not salvaged off the property site is taken over to the mill site, where it will be available for salvage until a later date. Pressure treated wood is being set aside for the Skills Park. Any wood that is not salvaged from the mill site will be ground down to make hog fuel for the G-P Wauna Mill. The grinder pulls out all the nails and a bin catches them so they, too, can be recycled.

Finally, the structure is down to the subfloor. The wood, metal, plastic and insulation items are disposed of as described earlier. While removing concrete, the primary waste pipe is located, capped and signed off as complete by Vernonia Public Works. The concrete and asphalt are broken down into smaller pieces to be taken to the mill site, where they are sorted, broken down further and prepared for crushing. When sufficient material has been accumulated, a crusher will be brought in to crush the concrete. If taken back to the contractor’s yard, the concrete will also be blended with the shingles and drywall. The crusher also sorts out nails and rebar for Metro Metals.

Depending on the depth of the home’s foundation, what remains is a 1-3 foot depression where the structure was located. This depression will be filled, leveled and seeded with grass during the spring months.

See Demolition, page 22

Deconstruction of a flood buyout property is shown, right, in four stages from start to empty lot. Photos by Jamie Jones.

