

Two years to the day later, some good news from floods (Globe Gazette editorial)

Posted: Monday, June 7, 2010 11:08 pm

As much of a heartache as the 2008 flood has been for some homeowners, it remains a giant headache for the city.

After constantly changing negotiations with FEMA over funding qualifications for buyouts of flood-damaged structures, the city finally has been able to provide homeowners some checks. Now, it is tearing down some of those flood-ravaged homes.

Thankfully, though, some good may come of all this: Materials could be salvaged from some homes before they're demolished. Some structures may even be moved. Something new and livable can be salvaged from the scrap heap.

But that's down the line a bit. Structures being demolished now have been deemed structurally unstable. FEMA and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources forbid any salvage from these structures.

That makes sense; no one should be inside or around a house that's unstable unless they're professionals. There's too great a chance for injury.

But down the line, if a structure is stable and the city has determined it's appropriate to salvage all or part of the house, Habitat for Humanity will get those salvage rights.

After asbestos is removed, Habitat can remove individual elements from the building or move it intact to a new lot.

That's good news for Habitat for Humanity. The nonprofit organization that mainly builds new homes for folks in need can perhaps provide a home by moving it.

Or it can use salvaged materials to help build a house or sell them at its ReStore, which sells new and gently used building materials and other home-improvement items to the public at great savings.

Talk about the benefits of recycling. People in need may benefit from new dwellings, Habitat will make some money at its store and reusable materials will be diverted from area landfills.

If Habitat is not interested in a property or wants to salvage only certain elements, the city will take bids from qualified demolition contractors to remove the structures. Some houses also may be sold at auction in 2012.

So there are several options to reuse part or all of buyout homes rather than demolishing them.

One thing is important to note: No matter whether the properties are owned by the city, Habitat for Humanity or private contractors, there's no open door to those who want to salvage items on their own. City officials said thieves have entered about 70 flood-damaged homes in the past several months, taking anything they could salvage. Some have put themselves at risk of personal harm.

That's not only stupid but illegal. The properties don't belong to them and they'll be arrested if caught.

It's just another of the problems, hassles, heartbreak and headaches caused by the flood of 2008, two years ago today.

At least now, though, some good is happening. Better times are ahead — and for that we can all be grateful. And sigh a collective breath of relief.