Tackling Tornado Tax Deductions in Montgomery County

iLOOKABOUT

Memorial Day weekend is typically the kickoff to summer, a festive time attending parades, backyard BBQing, and spending time with family while honoring fallen military personnel. May is also the most common month for tornadoes. Unfortunately for several states, the May long weekend of 2019 was not much of a holiday as more than 500 tornadoes touched down. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) declared May 27th to May 29th a major disaster for eleven counties in Ohio. For Montgomery County, twenty-one tornadoes with westerly winds up to 140 miles per hour cut two swaths of catastrophic damage and devasted lives. The Enhanced Fujita Scale categorized the tornadoes as EF2 and EF3 or considerable to severe damage.

Major storms are horrifying to experience, and the aftermath is heartbreaking. Extensive damage causes blocked roadways, power outages and boil water advisories. Timing is critical for keeping everyone safe, getting access to much needed help and necessary supplies. With so much damage, loss and lives turned upside-down, who would have time to think about taxes! But Montgomery County has their property owners' interests at heart.

It was essential to the Montgomery County Auditor's Office to have advanced preparedness including digital imagery and technology that enabled them to rapidly respond to property appraisals for financial aid. This planning assisted owners of damaged properties apply for property tax deductions as well as FEMA funding. The appraisals were made quickly and efficiently using aerial imagery integrated into the web-based desktop appraisal platform, GeoViewPort (GVP) from iLOOKABOUT.

Project Overview

If a property is damaged due to storms, naturally the property's value decreases. Determining the property's new value can be a slow process out in the field, but software like GeoViewPort exists to make the process faster, saving time and money by using desktop review.

In just eleven business days, 17 staff members of the Montgomery County Auditor's Office examined 14,000 parcels through desktop review and some field examination while also completing their regular duties. They identified 4,434 damaged properties in ten jurisdictions which sustained storm damage, particularly in the cities of Dayton, Brookville, Trotwood as well as Harrison Township. The GVP platform provided categories for identifying the tornadoes effects. These included no damage, shingles missing, minor, moderate and major damage. Most of the parcels examined were residential, but agricultural, commercial/industrial and non-exempt property classes were also included.

The appraisers reviewed the parcels and identified the damage level, but Ohio state law presents a challenge which requires homeowners to complete application forms for tax deductions. Once filed, a County appraiser can then review the property and confirm the deduction. Due to the restrictions, a widespread public outreach was launched to capture as many damaged property owners as possible through direct mailing, newspaper, print, television, Congress, public meetings, and mobile assistance centers.

> "After the devastating tornadoes that hit the Greater Dayton area, we were fortunate to have an existing relationship with iLOOKABOUT."
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> **Doug Trout,** Montgomery County Auditor's Office

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Getting Started

Fortunately for Montgomery County Auditor's Office, parcel data verification and street-level imagery for all their properties had been completed not long before the tornadoes had struck, so comparison data was current. Street-level photography was collected by iLOOKABOUT using their multi-image collection methodology. The GVP platform, also from iLOOKABOUT, provided all the data visualization tools in one high resolution desktop viewer. Staff workflow management was assigned and tracked through GVP's Management Module. The County also had an aerial imagery contract with EagleView Technologies to create new aerial imagery after disaster events. Thus, new aerial imagery was collected of the tornado damage and made available through GVP with the assessment data and street-level imagery.

Results to Date

All of the property review for the Memorial Day tornadoes damage was completed by the Montgomery County Auditor's Office in about two weeks. The tax relief program for damaged property accepted applications for approximately three months. It was important to the County to assist as many as possible to save money on property tax bills during this traumatic time.

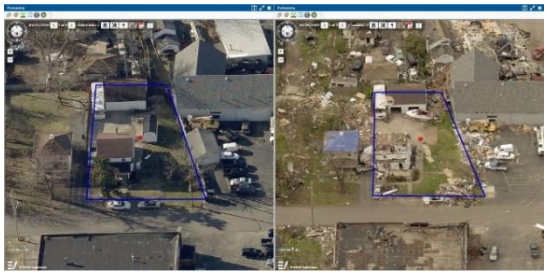
Although tornado season has passed, mother nature may strike again with wildfires, earthquakes, flooding, hurricanes or ice storms. Having the imagery and technology to assess whatever damage may arise is critical. Property owners can be thankful when their government has the foresight to be prepared in advance and support efforts to provide financial aid.

Recognition

Doug Trout, Real Estate Director at the Montgomery County Auditor's Office summed it up; "*After the devastating tornadoes that hit the Greater Dayton area, we were fortunate to have an existing relationship with iLOOKABOUT. [They] were able to … provide a side by side aerial photo comparison of all potentially damaged properties prior to and after the tornado. The software allowed us to categorize and identify properties that were damaged. It was user friendly and enabled us to complete a storm damage survey in house and in a short period of time. We were able to train 17 staff members in a short 15-minute presentation to be fully functioning members of the team. The results of our survey were the most comprehensive to date and were used not just in the Auditor's office but shared with impacted stakeholders across the Miami Valley. Without this software, the process of identifying damaged properties would have been more cumbersome, expensive and time consuming. The team at iLOOKABOUT was a pleasure to work with.*"

GVP is a web-based geographic information system (GIS) platform which federates property related data and enables efficient and comprehensive data validation for real property appraisal. The software platform includes three modules; Desktop Review, Management Module and Mobile Appraiser. Users can compare CAMA, oblique, aerial and street-level images overlaid on the parcel fabric, sorted by land use codes. iLOOKABOUT's suite of software as a service is offered to both public and private clients in North America.

GeoViewPort



GVP comparison imagery of Montgomery County after the Memorial Day tornadoes in 2019.

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