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Elgin area recovering from storms, preparing for possible flooding

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FEEDBACK

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Storm-related damage underneath the road and along a hillside is seen where Prospect Avenue ends at Linden Avenue in Elgin in the Lords Park neighborhood. The footage was shot using a drone purchased by the Elgin Fire Department in December. (City of Elgin)



After storms on-and-off since Tuesday night swamped the Elgin area, crews were still at work Thursday cleaning up, with some city staff using new technology for the first time in the field.

Mid-morning Thursday, Elgin Fire Battalion Chief Rich Carter and Police Officer Kevin Snow, with Fire Chief Dave Schmidt there to observe, were in the Lords Park neighborhood, where Preston Avenue ends at Linden Avenue, flying a drone with camera to survey damage — a washout of the hilly terrain and infrastructure underneath that T-intersection.

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According to Elgin Communications Specialist Molly Center, a 15-inch storm sewer that ran on the south edge of Linden broke overnight between Tuesday and Wednesday during the storms, and the hillside collapsed. As of Thursday morning, that spot was the only road closure remaining in the city, Center said.

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"That will be closed for some time while we work on stabilizing the embankment,"

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While the Fire Department purchased drone equipment in December, and some police officers and firefighters are trained to use it, Carter and Snow were making video and taking photographs of the washed out area with it for Water Director Kyla Jacobsen.

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"The drone really helps us," Jacobsen said. "We can't really get down there, because it's unstable. This gives us a bird's eye view."

Jacobsen said between 6 and 7 inches of rain fell between Tuesday night and Thursday morning in Elgin. This was the first time in her career she could recall an Elgin street washing out this way.

She said she met with five contractors Thursday morning to discuss possible avenues for making repairs. They will probably use gravel to build up the hill, then fix the storm sewer, Jacobsen said. A structural engineer would have to evaluate the road to decide if it could be repaired or if it will be need to be replaced.

Prior to city staff showing up with the drone, Sally Rhymes who lives in the Lords Park neighborhood, took a look at the damage.

"I've lived in this area for 52 years, and this is the first time I've ever seen anything like this around here," Rhymes said.

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Rhymes noted a positive that should come out of the washout. She said that residents had been complaining about how a utility pole at Preston and Linden was leaning. Now, it appears workers will have to right that pole as part of the broader project.

As for other cleanup work taking part in Elgin Thursday, Center said, "Forestry continues to address storm related issues with two crews — one on each side of town taking care of incoming cases. A contractor is assisting with removing hazard trees."

Center said the forestry crews were out from 12:30 a.m. Wednesday and for most of that day responding to more than 30 calls for service and addressing tree-related damage, the most of which happened south of Chicago Street to the city's southern limits.

Sewer crews had been out from late Tuesday night and worked overnight again Wednesday into Thursday to complete storm-related work.

"Street flooding has subsided, except on Varsity Drive where Poplar Creek is still over the road, but passable," Center said.

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Center said that at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday, ComEd's outage map noted 51 power outages in Elgin impacting more than 4,100 customers. As of noon Thursday, the map noted just two outages affecting 24 customers in Elgin.

In downtown Elgin, a walk along the banks of the Fox River offered evidence of how much rain had fallen. Bridges leading to Walton Islands were closed as water was partially flooding the ground.



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Walton Islands in the Fox River in downtown Elgin were left partially flooded by recent bad storms. (Mike Danahey / The Courier-News)

In rural Elgin, Arlene Watermann Thursday afternoon said she and her son have been without electricity and using a generator since late Tuesday night.

Watermann said that quite a few utility poles snapped in an area covering more than a mile. Crews were still out making repairs and hoped to be finished by

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With the river so high, East Dundee was making sandbags and sand available for free to residents, with the material available in a vacant lot not far from the police station off Railroad Street.

In West Dundee, parts of the town's riverwalk was underwater, including the standing area under a gazebo along that path.

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That village sent an email to its residents and posted on social media Thursday morning noting that the Fox already had reached a minor flood stage and was expected to crest next Tuesday at about 13.5 feet.

As a precautionary measure, the village was asking for volunteers to meet Thursday at the dead end of Oregon Avenue, next to the river, to help fill sandbags that might be needed to protect businesses and residences in the next few days.

Among those out helping Thursday afternoon were former village president, Larry Keller, and the village's manager Joe Cavallaro.

Cavallaro said the highest the river has crested prior to this prediction was 12.7 feet in April 2013. This was the second time in 10 years West Dundee had readied sandbags, he said.

"The river lever becomes an issue for us when its crest is 10 feet or more," Cavallaro said.

He added, though, that typically West Dundee only has to worry about flooding at two places along the Fox — near the Village Squire off First Street and where Edwards Avenue ends near the river.

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