





The local Everglades City grocery store was out of commission as the owners repair damage from September's hurricane. (Courtesy Photo)

Hurricane Irma's devastating blow on Everglades City did not keep the small town down for long. Only weeks after destruction hit, the city's historical society plans to rebuild a town that's better than ever.

Marya Repko, president of Everglades Society for Historic Preservation, explained that a 4-foot storm surge left numerous homes and business flooded, completely destroying many and deeming them uninhabitable. Even still, many areas are covered in grey, silty mud and many people have limited access to grocery stores.

"There was a terrible amount of debris everywhere," she said. "It was clothes, furniture, appliances and everything."

While many ruined goods and personal items have been sent to landfills, Repko shared other plans for dilapidated buildings. Instead of tearing them down, the historical society plans to relocate them and develop a historical village to create a focal point for tourists and locals.

The project is envisioned as having a native plant garden, small businesses — such as cafes, boutiques, coffee shops and book stores — historic fishing boats, and even the town's Chamber of Commerce.

The historical society hopes that businessmen and women with damaged buildings will donate the buildings for the historical village. They are still in the process of finding a plot of land to construct on.

Repko explained that they intend for the village to represent the city's large tourism and fishing components. Partially inspired by the beginning of stone crab season, a major event for locals on Oct. 15, the Everglades Society wants only to represent the culture of the town.

"Because fishing is so important down here, we should also have some old boats if we can find old ones that are not seaworthy but can represent what life was like," she said.

While the Historical Village is the primary focus for Repko and her team, another initiative is in the works. They are also working on gathering donations to help individuals in their community get back on their feet. They have already received a few thousand dollars to help families get supplies, food, new furniture and the other goods and services required to rebuild their lives. There is no specific monetary goal in mind, but they are seeking as much help as possible.

“Almost everybody in the town needs to replace their possessions,” she said. “Because we’re so far away from anything else - it takes 30 miles to get to the nearest Publix or anything - we’re really remote and we have to take care of ourselves and get on with life.”

More information and donation forms are on the Everglades Society’s website, evergladeshistorical.org. Hurricane relief donations can be made through reachouteverglades.org.





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