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How Charlotte developers, contractors have prepped sites for Hurricane Florence

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As Hurricane Florence began to bear down on the Carolina coast on Thursday, general contractors and real estate developers in Charlotte have prepped their construction sites to try to minimize impact from the powerful storm.

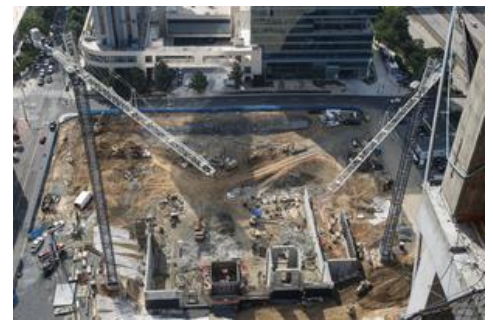
The Charlotte area is expected to see tropical-force winds Friday morning and total rainfall accumulation between 10 and 15 inches from Florence, a Category 1 hurricane with sustained winds of 90 miles per hour as of 8 a.m. on Friday. Residents began prepping for the storm, which is following a more southwestern track than initially anticipated, earlier this week — some gas stations are now out of fuel and area grocery stores are largely cleared out of bottled water, nonperishables and other supplies.

Charlotte, amid a construction boom, is expected to see flooding and heavy winds throughout town, including active construction sites, of which there are dozens across the metro area.

In uptown, there are several sites in varying stages of construction, some with multiple crane towers and nearing the topping-out stage, while others are undergoing extensive subterranean work. The Grand Bohemian Hotel, a 254-room, 15-floor hotel, is under construction at Trade and Church streets. General contractor JE Dunn Construction and developer The Kessler Collection broke ground on the \$110 million project in May.

"Because we're going vertical on that job and because we're downtown, we rushed to ensure that any of the concrete slabs that were not poured got poured before the storm, so we went ahead and got the third floor poured," said Josh McConaughey, vice president at the Charlotte office of JE Dunn.

He said crews have also either taken construction materials like plywood and lumber off-site or strapped them down to ensure high winds don't blow them away. Perimeter site fencing, tree-protection fencing and scaffolding on Trade Street have been more securely anchored where needed, and the crane tower on-site will be set to weather-vane mode so that it will spin freely in the wind. Temporary pumps are also on hand to help mitigate stormwater runoff where possible.



MELISSA KEY

Ally Charlotte Center is seen under construction in uptown. The tower cranes on this site will be set to rotation mode in anticipation of Hurricane Florence.

JE Dunn is also serving as general contractor of Childress Klein's mixed-use Apex SouthPark project, at the former home of the "ski slope" Sharon United Methodist Church where a new mixed-use development will rise. McConaughey said that site is in excavation stage, which could be problematic in the event of heavy rains — expected when Florence arrives in Charlotte this weekend.

"As we get this much rain, we want to make sure we don't have runoff, so we're preparing to ensure water remains on the site and it doesn't go on Sharon (Road) or Morrison (Boulevard)," McConaughey said.

Charlotte developer Crescent Communities — which has three tower cranes up in Charlotte right now, one at Novel Atherton in South End and two at Ally Charlotte Center in uptown — will also put its cranes in rotation mode. Crescent said in a statement that its general contractors have put in place a "full provision" of preparations in advance of the storm and have been implementing them since last week.

Charlotte-based Edifice is general contractor on several construction projects here, including The RailYard in South End, The Refinery on West Morehead Street and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's central division facility in uptown as well as projects elsewhere in Florence's projected path in the Carolinas. The company has completed myriad tasks ahead of the storm on its sites, including checking all erosion control measures, fastening down loose materials, covering up windows as needed, securing HVAC duct work to the center of buildings, opening drains on building rainwater channels, covering useable soils to prevent wash and putting all mobile scaffolds on the ground, according to Gary Creed, chief operating officer at Edifice.

Chris Frye, partner at Barringer Construction, said the company has assembled storm response teams in Charlotte and Raleigh to handle storm prep and to secure properties as well as to evaluate any sites for customers following the storm. Barringer's current projects here include the AC Hotel in SouthPark and a building renovation project on Kings Drive in midtown.

"We don't know what we're going to get until it gets here so we've got four teams set up," Frye said, adding the teams will be ready to go into action as needed as the storm subsides. "We're going to have a daily call through the weekend and stay in touch as requests come in to assess the damage."

Frye said on its construction sites, Barringer has ensured storm requirements are meeting city standards, tied down loose materials and put down sandbags to help divert water. At Brewers at 4001 Yancey, which Barringer served as general contractor on, the company has provided a 1-megawatt generator to keep the brewery's products cold should the building lose power.

Work won't restart until Monday or, likelier, Tuesday at JE Dunn's local projects, but the leadership team will be checking out sites before signing off on any crews returning to work.

"We have internal checks and processes for each of these types of storm events, so we all feel pretty confident that we've done what we can to mitigate the risks," McConaughey said. "We've done everything we can within reason to make sure our (crews and sites) are safe."

In other storm-related news, the city of Charlotte has canceled its monthly zoning meeting, which was scheduled for Monday, Sept. 17. Charlotte Mayor Vi Lyles has instead called a special meeting at 4 p.m. on Sept. 24 the following week that will include the regular business meeting as well as items from the zoning agenda. The city of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County offices are also closing today at noon, with CharMeck 311 and 911 emergency services to remain active.

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