

# LOCAL

ALABAMA TORNADOES & THE RECOVERY

## FEMA: Spend correctly

### Misuse of disaster money can be trouble

By **ROBIN DeMONIA**  
*News staff writer*

Tornado victims who get government aid need to use it for the intended purpose and to hold on to receipts to document

their spending, emergency management officials said Wednesday.

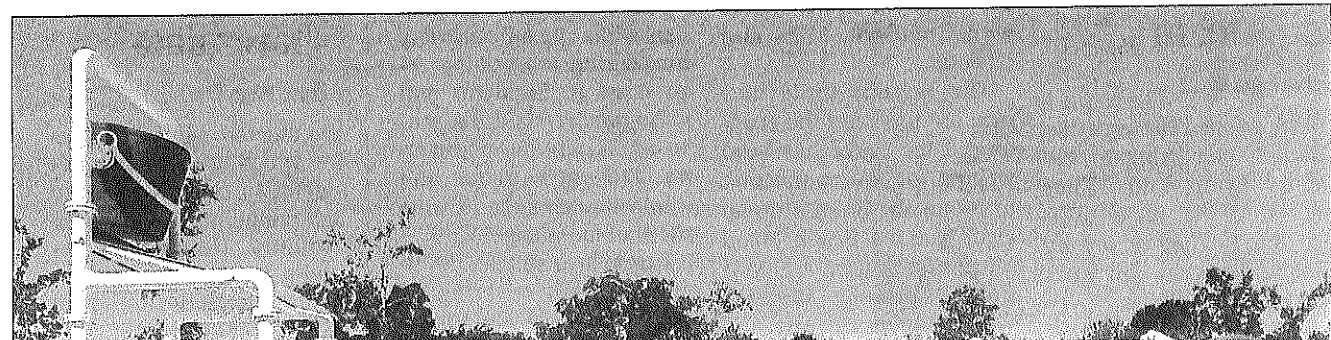
"If you've been seriously affected by this disaster, you probably have a long list of financial needs," Jeff Byard, the state coordinating officer for the Alabama Emergency Management Agency, said in a press release. "It's tempting to use the assistance money to pay your most pressing bills, but stop and think before you spend that money on anything that's not disas-

ter-related."

The Federal Emergency Management Agency can go back for up to three years to make sure disaster assistance was spent properly. The agency has said in the past that people who misuse disaster assistance may be asked to repay it, and they may become ineligible for future assistance.

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### Splash time!



**N** NEWS EXCLUSIVE

# Lane Parke to get redesign

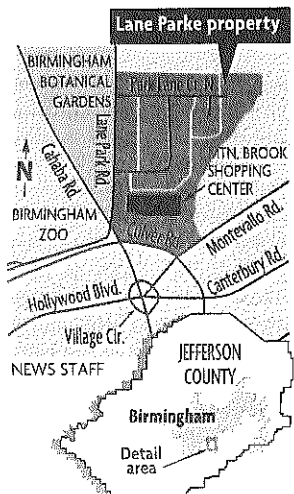
### Scaling back approved plan

By **WILLIAM THORNTON**  
*News staff writer*

Mountain Brook Village's proposed Lane Parke mixed-use development is getting another redesign and a new planning partner. Organizers hope to begin construction on

the project — now three years in the making — sometime next spring, but they will have to once again navigate the city's zoning process.

Birmingham-based Daniel Corp., developer of Greystone, Ross Bridge, Grand River



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## FUNDS: Keep receipts for 3 years

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FEMA spokeswoman Vickii Howell said Wednesday's warning is a standard reminder issued after disasters and is not the result of any widespread problem in Alabama.

However, nonprofits working with storm victims in the state do report scattered instances in which people have used disaster aid for something other than the intended purpose.

Deidra Tatum, the executive director of the Walker County Community Action Agency, said she knows some storm victims who have used grants intended for housing repairs to buy other things, and she even heard secondhand of someone who used \$30,000 in housing assistance to buy a car.

But in the cases in which she has direct knowledge, Tatum said, the problem often stemmed from the fact FEMA aid wasn't enough to cover the work needed on a storm victim's home, which

may not have been in good shape before being hit by a tornado.

"They didn't have enough to get the roof repaired so they spent it for something else," she said. "We've been encouraging them to spend it on the designated purpose. . . I don't think they know they may be asked for those funds back."

The concern has been great enough that Tatum and others involved in the state's long-term recovery task force are working on financial-guidance programs to help storm victims appropriately handle any aid they receive.

Jim Byard, the director of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, which is overseeing the state's long-term recovery effort, said the concern brought to the task force's attention was that some storm victims have "limited banking experience" and may not be prepared for a large check from FEMA.

Groups such as Tatum's suggested programs "to make sure that money is used for what it was intended for — basically to ensure people don't get a windfall and do something with it that they may regret

in a couple of months," said Byard, who is Jeff Byard's brother.

Michael Byrne, who as federal coordinating officer is FEMA's top official in Alabama, has said it's not likely that all the individual assistance grant checks will be closely scrutinized. But he said that doesn't lessen the responsibility of aid recipients to use the money appropriately.

"Are we gonna count every nail, you know, and stuff like that? Probably not," Byrne said in an interview earlier this month.

But, he said, "If you ask for our assistance for a specific requirement and we provide it to you, it's sort of like a social contract. . . Your fellow citizens have found that you're in need at this point in time because of an unfortunate event that was beyond your control, and . . . we're in a position where we can help each other. And so because we're going to do that, it's incumbent upon you to use it prudently."

Lynda Lowe, the individual assistance branch director at FEMA's field office in Birmingham, said storm victims are allowed to use their funds "broadly." But she

said those who don't use FEMA money for the intended purpose may be hurting themselves in the long run.

She said nonprofits that help with housing repairs, for instance, will ask about any money received from FEMA for that purpose and won't duplicate what has been funded already.

"They don't want to use their resources to pay for something that FEMA's already paid for," Lowe said. "All agencies traditionally look at duplication of benefits, because that's a serious issue."

Tatum, the head of Walker County's Community Action Agency, agreed that is a concern. "We do not want to assist someone who bought a car instead of repairing their home," she said.

Her agency is encouraging storm victims to hold onto FEMA aid even if it is not enough to repair their homes, she said. The FEMA money, she said, can be used for materials, for instance, and other agencies can help furnish labor and other assistance needed to get the job done.

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