

2: Planning Process

Vermont Emergency Management (VEM) was the lead agency responsible for updating the 2023 Vermont State Hazard Mitigation Plan (SHMP). The SHMP update process involved three primary groups: the Planning Team (comprised of VEM and VEM’s supporting contractor, **SWCA Environmental Consultants (SWCA)**), the **State Hazard Mitigation Planning and Policy Committee (SHMPPC)**, and the **State Hazard Mitigation Plan Steering Committee (Steering Committee)**.

Hazard Mitigation staff at VEM (Ben Rose, Recovery and Mitigation Section Chief, Stephanie Smith, State Hazard Mitigation Officer, and Caroline Paske and Brian McWalters, Hazard Mitigation Planners, Matthew Hand and Hanna Pecora, VEM Interns) were responsible for managing the planning process and development of the 2023 SHMP, to include: convening various groups and providing logistical support; providing subject-matter expertise in hazard mitigation, planning, and FEMA review; researching and writing the Plan document; and making day-to-day decisions on operations throughout the process. SWCA was responsible for planning and helping VEM to implement stakeholder engagement related to the Plan, including SHMPPC and Steering Committee meetings, surveys, interview guide, workshops, facilitating Steering Committee review of the draft Plan, and public webinar introducing the updated Plan.



Figure 4: 2023 Vermont State Hazard Mitigation Plan process timeline

State Hazard Mitigation Planning & Policy Committee

The SHMPPC is composed of State agency and departmental leadership that are involved in decision making and implementation related to hazard mitigation. The SHMPPC provides high level guidance and oversight to ensure the SHMP process and plan content aligned with other state-level mandates, policies, and programs. This committee was responsible for sending delegates to participate on various groups, staying apprised of the SHMP update process, and making recommendations to the Steering Committee on overall coordination with State government. The SHMPPC will be tasked with implementation of Plan actions that are the responsibility of State government. The Planning Team engaged with SHMPPC members three times over the course of the Plan update process. Initial outreach to kick off the process and gather SHMPPC input took place via email in August, and two subsequent virtual meetings in December and June.

State Hazard Mitigation Plan Steering Committee

Under the direction of the SHMPPC, the Steering Committee was responsible for the high-level decision-making and overall guidance of the SHMP update process. Given the interdisciplinary and cross-sector nature of hazard mitigation work, the Steering Committee included a diverse range of cross-sector partners from across Vermont. The Steering Committee members were chosen with the following goals in mind: to ensure that hazard mitigation efforts beyond State government were incorporated into the Plan update; to better coordinate ongoing hazard mitigation work between State agencies and partners; and to build buy-in, relationships and understanding needed to effectively implement the Plan.

Table 5: State Hazard Mitigation Planning & Policy Committee	
Secretary Kristin Clouser	Agency of Administration
Deputy Secretary Douglas Farnham	Agency of Administration (alternate)
Secretary Julie Moore	Agency of Natural Resources
Secretary Lindsay Kurrle	Agency of Commerce and Community Development
Secretary Joe Flynn	Agency of Transportation
Commissioner Jennifer Fitch	Buildings and General Services
Secretary Anson Tebbetts	Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets
Commissioner June Tierney	Public Service Department
Secretary Jenney Samuelson	Agency of Human Services
Director Erica Bornemann	Vermont Emergency Management
Interim Director Eric Forand	Vermont Emergency Management

The Steering Committee was comprised of staff from State agencies and other entities who are directly involved in implementing the Plan or managing data relevant to the Plan update process. The Planning Team held six Steering Committee meetings over the course of the Plan update process. During and between meetings, Steering Committee members provided detailed review and guidance on Plan content as well as data, information, and other key inputs based on their knowledge of hazards, vulnerabilities, capabilities, and implementation of mitigation actions.

Table 6: State Hazard Mitigation Plan Steering Committee	
Alyssa Sabetto	Windham Regional Commission
Andrea Wright	Agency of Transportation
Ben Dejong	Agency of Natural Resources (State Geologist)
Ben Rose	Vermont Emergency Management
Bill Jordan	Public Service Department
Bronwyn Cooke	Agency of Commerce and Community Development
Jared Ulmer	Department of Health (Heat & Climate)
Jason Gosselin	Agency of Human Services
John Broker-Campbell	Agency of Natural Resources (Rivers Program)
Karen Horn	Vermont League of Cities and Towns
Kathy Decker	Agency of Natural Resources (Forest Parks and Recreation)
Lesley-Ann Dupigny-Giroux	University of Vermont (State Climatologist)
Marian Wolz	Agency of Natural Resources (Climate Action Office)
Mary Russ	White River Partnership
Nicole Dubuque	Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets
Samara Coble	Vermont Disaster Recovery Fund
Sarah Phillips	Agency of Human Services (Office of Economic Opportunity)
Tara Kulkarni	Norwich University

The Steering Committee developed the Plan scope and process, assisted in the development of the stakeholder engagement and outreach plan, identified and prioritized hazards for inclusion, approved and assisted in the development of mitigation actions, set the prioritization process for actions, reviewed and approved the Plan document, and as individuals, provided subject matter expertise throughout Plan development. Steering Committee members were appointed by the VEM Director based on recommendations from the SHMPPC.

Planning Process & Plan Development

August 8, 2022 Initial SHMPPC Outreach — Process Planning:

VEM initially engaged the SHMPPC in August of 2022 to inform them of the update process, solicit initial feedback on the 2018 SHMP, appoint members to the Steering Committee, and review the draft engagement plan.

September 14, 2022 Steering Committee — Process Planning & Kick-Off:

The Steering Committee met for the first time in September 2023 to confirm the update process, including review of the stakeholder engagement plan, process and schedule for the plan update, and the role of the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee discussed strengths and areas for improvement from the 2018 SHMP and planning process. This meeting was held virtually with polling and a shared whiteboard.

October 21, 2022 Steering Committee — Capabilities & Hazard Profiles:

In October, the Steering Committee met to confirm the structure for updates to the [State & Local Capabilities](#) and [Vermont Profile & Hazard Assessment](#) sections, to confirm the current list of capabilities and identify any new capabilities to highlight within the Plan and to confirm the list of hazards to be addressed. The Steering Committee had an initial conversation to brainstorm topics for the new [Vulnerability Summary](#) section of the Plan. This meeting was held in-person and virtually with a shared whiteboard.



November 9, 2022 Stakeholder Group — Frontline Community Engagement:

Following the recommendation of the Steering Committee, a focus group was held in November to discuss the incorporation of frontline community perspectives into the development of the Plan. This small group reviewed and provided recommended edits to the engagement plan and provided recommendations for how the plan calculates risk and impact. Out of this conversation came changes to the risk assessment to focus on how quality of life can be impacted by disaster events instead of the narrower view of only injuries and fatalities, and additional engagement efforts to include a town survey directly addressing local vulnerability and concerns as well as direct individual interviews.

Additionally, there were a number of other State planning efforts identified for coordination with the SHMP update. These included the the Climate Action Office Public Engagement Task Group, Public Service Department’s public engagement plan to guide a comprehensive review of Vermont’s renewable and clean electricity policies and programs for the Comprehensive Energy Plan, and the Department of Environmental Conservation’s work with the Center for Whole Communities, Rights and Democracy Institute, and the Vermont Law School Environmental Justice Clinic to produce a report of recommendations on equitable public participation and community engagement¹. Meetings were held with project managers of these State efforts to identify opportunities for collaboration and to ensure stakeholders would not be overly burdened with multiple State requests for input into planning processes.

November 2022-March 2023 Direct Stakeholder Outreach — Capabilities & Hazard Profiles:

In November, VEM staff began drafting the [State & Local Capabilities](#) section, the [Vermont Profile & Hazard Assessment](#) section, and the profiles for each hazard. During plan drafting, VEM staff reached out to Steering Committee members as well as other key stakeholders for one-on-one conversations regarding specific sections of the plan. Draft documents were also shared for review and feedback.

1 <https://wholecommunities.org/resources-archive/connecting-people-to-power/>

Stakeholder engagement session to develop plan actions

Photo Credit: Lisa Kolb, VEM



December 20, 2022 SHMPPC — Progress Check-In:

The SHMPPC met in December and VEM shared its progress updating the Plan to date, specifically that the 2023 Plan will have the same basic structure and approach as in 2018, with some changes to make the Plan stronger, including a focus on improving how the Plan addresses vulnerabilities in more detail within each hazard profile and within a new [Vulnerability Summary](#) and greater focus on impacts to people, specifically frontline communities. SHMPPC members shared input and guidance on areas of focus for the Plan, alignment with the Climate Action Plan, and other engagement efforts with which VEM should coordinate. Following this meeting, VEM set up direct conversations to address better coordinate between outreach efforts with the Vermont Agency of Transportation, the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Climate Action Office, and the Public Service Department.

January 27, 2023 Steering Committee — Vulnerabilities & Workshop Planning:

In January, the Steering Committee met to review and discuss a proposed approach to addressing vulnerabilities in the Plan, including a proposed set of approaches for incorporating frontline community perspectives into the planning process and Plan content. Additionally, the committee reviewed a proposed approach and sequence of events for workshopping and prioritizing the list of mitigation actions for the Plan. This meeting was held virtually.

April 7 & April 18, 2023 Stakeholder Workshops — Action Development:

The Planning Team held two stakeholder workshop sessions to support in-depth discussion of the mitigation actions as the draft Plan was being developed. In March, prior to the two stakeholder workshops to develop Plan actions, VEM hosted a virtual workshop orientation webinar as an educational opportunity to explain what hazard mitigation is and how stakeholders can participate in the stakeholder workshops.

In preparation for the stakeholder workshops, VEM staff reviewed the 2018 action list and the actions from the Climate Action Plan. 2018 actions that were completed or noted as no longer relevant during our annual action maintenance process were removed, which is noted in [Appendix X: Status of 2018 SHMP Actions](#).

The two stakeholder workshops took place in April 2023, with both virtual and in-person options offered. Attendees reviewed and discussed all the actions from the 2018 Plan and provided updates and suggested changes. VEM sought input on topics to better address during this update cycle, such as climate migration, slow-developing hazards, and frontline communities. Outcomes of these discussions informed the content of the Plan, particularly the new [Vulnerabilities Section](#) and the updated list of mitigation actions in the [Mitigation Strategy](#).

May 4, 2023 Steering Committee — Action Development & Prioritization:

In May, the Steering Committee met to go over the feedback received during the stakeholder workshops and review and update the process for prioritizing plan actions. Following this meeting, VEM staff reviewed all feedback received on plan actions and created the first draft of the 2023 SHMP [Mitigation Strategy](#). VEM met

individually with key experts and Plan implementers for the various plan strategies in order to finalize edits to the plan actions.

May 9 & May 12, 2023 Stakeholder Group — Hazard Assessment:

The hazard assessment process to update priority hazard rankings for the 2023 SHMP was completed over two stakeholder meetings in May. Participants were selected based on expertise in hazard probability and impacts on the built environment, people, economy, and natural environment – to include several representatives from the Steering Committee, including the State Climatologist and State Geologist, as well as experts from the National Weather Service.

During the hazard assessment stakeholder group meetings, participants determined changes in probability and impacts due to climate change, changes in development and population demographics, and experience with hazards since the 2018 SHMP. Projected changes in location, range of anticipated intensities, frequency and duration of each hazard were determined in the hazard profile update process. The parameters of a plausibly significant event for each hazard ranked was based on historic occurrences of maximum magnitude events in Vermont, climate change projections, and impacts of events observed in similar climates within the United States. The final ranking of hazards is part of the risk assessment process included within the [Vermont Profile & Hazard Assessment](#).

May 31, 2023 Steering Committee — Hazard Assessment & Vulnerability:

At the end of May, the Steering Committee met to review and finalize the hazard assessment based on feedback from the stakeholder group the hazard assessment. Additionally, the Steering Committee reviewed final drafts of the [State & Local Capabilities](#), [Vermont Profile & Hazard Assessment](#), and [Vulnerability Summary](#) sections.

June 16, 2023 Steering Committee — Action Prioritization:

The final Steering Committee meeting during Plan drafting was in June 2023. Prior to this meeting, a survey was sent out to the Steering Committee as well as the stakeholders who participated in the action development workshops to solicit feedback on the draft action list. At this virtual meeting, the Steering Committee finalized plan actions and then voted on top plan priorities within the four goal areas. This prioritization process resulted in the final action list of 112 actions, 43 priorities, and 10 top Plan priorities.

Protect, restore and enhance Vermont’s natural resources to promote healthy, resilient ecosystems.

Enhance the resilience of our built environment – our communities, infrastructure, buildings, and cultural assets.

Develop and implement plans and policies that create resilient natural systems, built environments, and communities.

Create a common understanding of – and coordinated approach to – mitigation planning and action.

June 29, 2022 Initial SHMPPC Outreach — Draft Plan & Priority Action Review:

In June, the SHMPPC met virtually to review the final Executive Summary and plan action list as finalized and prioritized by the Steering Committee, including the top Plan priorities. The SHMPPC provided edits to both documents and reviewed the full draft plan when it was submitted to FEMA in July for final comments.

July 12, 2023 Public Review— Draft Plan Review:

The Planning Team held one virtual public meeting in July 2023 to report out on the Plan update process, share a summary of the draft SHMP, and seek input on mitigation actions and priorities from the public. This session included a presentation by VEM and the opportunity for members of the public to ask questions and share comments based on the presentation. Questions and comments shared during the webinar helped VEM refine the final Plan and highlight elements likely to be of most interest to local governments and residents referencing the Plan, such as [list parts of the plan].

Stakeholder Engagement & Outreach

The involvement of stakeholders was vital to this process. Stakeholders included subject matter experts, implementers, and representatives of frontline communities. The goals of stakeholder engagement included:

- To implement a planning process that includes representation from – and builds relationships between – stakeholders in all sectors and groups.
- To make the planning process and Plan documents transparent and accessible to a full range of stakeholders.

The following approaches were used to engage stakeholders and members of the public in the planning process and integrate their input into the Plan.

Surveys:

Surveys were developed to gather information from a wide range of stakeholders. These included:

- A municipal survey distributed to each Vermont municipality via the VEM newsletter and the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT). The objective of this survey was to gauge local input regarding emerging challenges, vulnerabilities and frontline community needs. Twenty-two (22) responses were received, representing a diverse group of Vermont communities.
- A Regional Planning Commission (RPC) survey was sent to each RPC asking them to coordinate internally and submit one response per RPC. The objective of this survey was to receive regional insight about emerging challenges and needs within their communities.
- A survey link was posted on the VEM website for the duration of plan development and available for anyone to submit general feedback available.

A summary of feedback received from surveys is included within the [Vulnerability Summary](#).

Interviews:

VEM conducted interviews with two individuals that interacted with the State’s buyout program to understand more about the experience and perspective of tenants (for whom buyouts are not voluntary) and homeowners who opted not to pursue a buyout. Results of these interviews are featured in the SHMP as case study examples illustrating the impacts of Hazard Mitigation programs on individual Vermonters, and to help identify opportunities to continue improving these programs.

Coordination on High Hazard Potential Dams:

As part of the SHMP 2023 update, VEM coordinated with State and Federal partners involved in dam safety. Between February and March 2022, VEM and VT Dam Safety worked with USACE Silver Jackets representatives to develop and submit a proposal for technical assistance on the SHMP 2023 High Hazard Potential Dams (HHPD) section through the Silver Jackets Interagency Nonstructural FPMS program.

While dams and dam safety were part of the 2018 SHMP, new policy guidance effective in April 2023 introduced new requirements for HHPD to maintain eligibility for the HHPD grant program. Several meetings were held to identify work that needed to be done to meet the new policy guidance and the steps necessary by partner agencies. FEMA was invited to kick-off the process of addressing SHMP HHPD requirements, with representatives from FEMA Region I mitigation planning and dam safety programs.

A review of requirements and existing data showed that work was needed to clarify the Vermont list of HHPDs. USACE was assigned to perform analysis utilizing DSS-WISE on significant hazard dams that may be HHPD depending on potential population impacted in the case of a dam failure. This work was ongoing at the time of SHMP submittal to FEMA for approval.

Direct Engagement with Individuals and Groups:

VEM staff invited partners and individuals throughout the State to be in touch if they were interested in discussing hazard mitigation. This effort started in earnest early in 2023, with a demonstrated willingness for VEM staff to attend local meetings of agencies and community groups around the State, with a particular focus on groups that include and serve frontline communities. The objective is to meet with people where they are and learn more about what Vermonters are noticing about emerging challenges and needs. Meetings where this Plan was discussed during development included:

- Inter-Agency Advisory Board to the Climate Action Office
- Environmental Justice Advisory Council

Environmental Justice Interagency Committee:

Act 154 was passed in Vermont in 2022, enacting a statewide Environmental Justice Policy. This policy codifies Vermont’s commitment to providing resources to environmental justice populations for resilience planning and disasters recovery. The Act directs numerous State agencies to embed environmental justice considerations into their operations through the development of an Environmental Justice Interagency Committee as well as an Environmental Justice Advisory Council. These two groups held their first joint meeting on March 10, 2023.

- Interagency Climate and Energy Workgroup (ICEPAC)
- Interagency Meeting to Discuss VT Equity & Municipality Initiatives
- Vermont Conservation District Managers Meeting
- Climate Action Toolkit Development Meetings
- Municipal Vulnerability Index
- VTrans Partners Meeting on the Resilience Improvement Plan (RIP)

VTrans held a meeting with partner agencies including VEM in March (28) 2023 to discuss coordination of the RIP with related State planning efforts. The RIP was being developed to meet Federal Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost Saving Transportation (PROTECT) guidance. The purpose of PROTECT is to help make surface transportation more resilient to natural hazards, including climate change, including flooding and other natural disasters through support of planning activities, resilience improvements, community resilience and evacuation routes.

These efforts will continue throughout the updating of the 2023 plan, and beyond, understanding that engagement on the front lines of hazard mitigation is an ongoing, iterative process.

Routine Updates via Newsletters & Partner Meetings:

VEM staff continually provided updates on the planning process and opportunities for involvement on the VEM website and through the VEM newsletter, the RPC list-serve, the Resilient Vermont email list, the Flood Ready list-serve, Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) newsletter, VEM-RPC monthly meetings, and in one-on-one emails to key stakeholders, organizations or expert reviewers. VEM maintained a full list of all participants who were involved or expressed interest at any point and sent out regular updates to that list. Events and news were also shared periodically on Facebook.

In addition to the outreach and stakeholder involvement opportunities listed above, regular updates were given on the planning process at Vermont Silver Jackets' quarterly meetings. Silver Jackets meetings include coordinating Federal agencies USACE, USGS, NWS, and FEMA. VEMA and ANR's Floodplain Manager staff are also in attendance at Silver Jackets meetings. Regular updates were also given at VEM Chiefs' meetings and VEM full-staff meetings.

Implementation Process Planning & Tool

Text



TABLE TO BE UPDATED

Table 7: 2018 State Hazard Mitigation Plan Participants

American Association of Retired Persons Vermont	Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission
Addison County Regional Planning Commission	United States Geological Survey
Army-Corps of Engineers	University of Vermont
Bethel Selectboard	USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission	USDA Rural Development
Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity	Vermont Agency of Administration
Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission	Vermont Agency of Agriculture
Community Resilience Organizations	Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development
Community Workshop	Vermont Agency of Human Services
Community-Resilience.org	Vermont Agency of Natural Resources
Composting Association of Vermont	Vermont Agency of Transportation
Conservation Law Foundation	Vermont Arts Council
Craftsbury Conservation Commission	Vermont Association of Hospitals and Health Systems
Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District	Vermont Buildings & General Services
Front Porch Community Planning & Design	Vermont Council on Rural Development
Green Mountain Power	Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation
High Meadows Fund	Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation - Dam Safety
Hurricane Flats Farm	Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation - Geological Survey
Irasburg Planning Commission	Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation
Lake Champlain Basin Program	Vermont Department of Health
Lamoille County Planning Commission	Vermont Division of Historic Preservation
Mad River Valley Planning District	Vermont Emergency Management
Memphremagog Watershed Association	Vermont Housing & Conservation Board
Milone and MacBroom	Vermont Land Trust
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	Vermont League of Cities & Towns
National Weather Service	Vermont Natural Resources Council
Northwest Regional Planning Commission	Vermont Realtors
Norwich University	Vermont River Conservancy
Saint Michael's College	Vermont Rural Water Association
Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission	Vermont Ski Area Association
The Nature Conservancy	Vermont Small Business Development Center
Town of Irasburg	Vermont Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster
Town of Northfield	Watersheds United Vermont
Town of Waterbury	White River Partnership