

VERMONT STATE HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING, SEPTEMBER 2017

State Hazard Mitigation Plan Steering Committee Meeting September 14, 2017 | 2-4 PM DPS, Waterbury, VT

Members Attending:

- Bob Costantino, AHS
- Catherine Dimitruk, Northwest Regional Planning Commission
- Richard Kehne, BGS
- Karen Horn, VLCT
- Mike Kline, ANR
- Tara Kulkarni, Norwich University
- Steve Libby, Vermont River Conservancy
- Rose Paul, The Nature Conservancy
- Ben Rose, VEM
- Tim Schmalz, Agency of Agriculture
- Joe Segale, VTrans
- Jenna Koloski, Vermont Council on Rural Development

*Staff: Lauren Oates and Stephanie Smith, Vermont Emergency Management
Facilitator: Rebecca Sanborn Stone, Community Workshop*

Agenda & Notes:

1. Hazard Mitigation Updates & Progress (from Steering Committee members)

- a. FEMA public assistance is available for the counties affected by July floods (FEMA Disaster #4330). Application date is 9/15; 59 applications received. Pre-disaster mitigation and flood mitigation funding is also now open, with a State deadline of October 27, 2017.
 - i. Note: Vermont is averaging one federally declared disaster per year now. That is 1.6 times the national average.
- b. FEMA is doing new loss avoidance studies to capture impacts of mitigation. There may be an opportunity to have them do that work in Vermont and train Vermonters to conduct those studies (Ben will pursue).
- c. VCRD held the national Climate Economy Summit in Burlington in September, and it was very successful. About 500 people attended. VCRD will be compiling and sharing summit findings.
- d. VCRD also continues to work with the Climate Economy model communities; Middlebury will be the next community.
- e. Recent study on climate models and precipitation projections for watersheds. More opportunities to do other watersheds and connect results with other projects like BGS and VTrans projects.
- f. Northwest Regional RPC is working on a pilot project with DEC around implementing BMPs for town roads.
- g. Norwich's Center for Global Resilience and Security (CGRS) convened the Resilient Vermont Network advisory group for a meeting in August, before the Working Group meetings. They discussed future directions for RVT, including playing a role in SHMP

implementation, and discussed plans for another statewide Resilient Vermont conference in June 2018.

- h. CGRS is also creating a fellowship program, which would create opportunities for resilience research and coordination across multiple campuses in Vermont.
- i. Agency of Agriculture is preparing to step up its surveys for ticks, including looking specifically for new species including the lonestar tick that are becoming threats.
- j. The Vermont River Conservancy is moving forward with two major projects. They are close to closing on a Brattleboro Floodplain conservation project and working on purchase and cleanup of a longtime salvage yard along the White River in Hancock. Both emerged from Irene priorities.
- k. The Nature Conservancy is about to launch its second round of water quality improvement projects, which also have major resilience benefits. They will be issuing an RFP shortly.
- l. BGS is moving forward on its study of hazard mitigation opportunities at state buildings and facilities.
- m. Vermont's Clean Water Week just wrapped up, with activities around the state organized by DEC and many watershed groups. Activities included a paddle of the Onion River in Montpelier, showcase of Northfield's Dog River mitigation project, and Barre mitigation projects.
- n. VLCT is working with towns on the municipal roads general permit, and also helping towns to build resilience into the new energy plan component of town plans.

2. SHMP Planning Process Updates

- a. Recent Progress
 - i. We held Working Group meetings in August at Norwich University, with approximately 40 people participating. Groups broke out and worked on three main steps:
 - 1. Offering additional feedback on goal and objective revisions
 - 2. Evaluating action ideas from the past plan or ideas that have emerged already (identifying which should continue, which should be changed, etc.)
 - 3. Identifying new actions for each objective
 - ii. Stephanie and Lauren worked with Mike Kline to take another look at the hazard list and ranking, and identified a new framework to take Steering Committee comments into account. (see notes below)
 - iii. VEM staff worked to revise goals and updates based on new feedback (see notes below)
- b. Process is moving into next phase – identifying and developing actions for the 2018 plan. This phase will carry us through the fall. (more details below on refinements to ideas)
 - i. VEM and CW recommend some changes to process timeline to leave more time for additional input and engagement at the action development stage. The most significant change is cancelling the October Working Group meeting and instead meeting in December.
- c. Steering Committee membership
 - i. Jenna Koloski is joining the Committee to represent VCRD in place of Paul Costello
 - ii. Greg Hanson is taking a new job, but a new representative from the National Weather Service will join

3. Goals & Objectives

- a. VEM has continued to refine the goals and objectives based on ongoing feedback from the Steering Committee and Working Groups. Substantive changes and feedback reflected in the current version (see meeting prep materials) includes:
 - i. VEM developed Education & Outreach objectives based on Steering Committee work in last meeting
 - ii. Some participants in Working Groups (August meeting) felt strongly about creating a specific goal and/or objective for protecting human populations. VEM felt that is captured in a newly updates education objective and in the overarching principle of protecting vulnerable populations.

Steering Committee discussion & decisions on goals and objectives:

- Committee approved of Education & Outreach goal and objectives in working form
- Committee would like to see some additional language integrated into goals to strengthen and sharpen the focus on people and communities:
 - Language in the Built Environment goal in particular (and other goals as applicable) to increase focus on people – mention of protecting homes, residents/citizens, or communities
 - Potential language: “safe communities and homes.”
 - Recognition in the Environment goal that people are part of ecosystem
 - Language to acknowledge the importance of protecting businesses, the economy, and functions in our communities
 - Language in the Education & Outreach goal (and others, as applicable) to acknowledge the importance of people protecting themselves and engaging actively in mitigation – not being passive players
 - Addition of language around identifying municipal champions to carry on this work locally
- VEM staff will work on incorporating new comments into goals and objectives again. Staff expect additional comments will continue to emerge through the next phase of the process.

4. Hazard List and Ranking

- a. Updates and recent work by VEM staff
 - i. Following the July Steering Committee meeting, VEM staff and Mike Kline met to again review the hazard list and adjust based on Steering Committee feedback (specifically around the lack of clarity as to what a hazard is).
 - ii. They arrived at a new framework, which distinguishes between **hazard events** and **hazard impacts**. (see meeting prep packet). Hazard impacts would be profiled and ranked in the plan, and would serve as the basis for planning decisions.
 - iii. They then ranked the hazard impact list based on probability and the impact scale introduced at the last meeting. The ranked list shown in the prep packet is based on the impact scores only, and aligns closely with the “gut feeling” ranking that Steering Committee members gave in July.

Steering Committee discussion & decisions on the revised hazard list:

- The Committee approved of the new framework (hazard impacts and hazard events), and the final list to be included in the plan (hazard impacts).
- The Committee requested that VEM staff make few changes to the ranking process and bring a revised ranking to the next meeting:

- Completing a more quantitative analysis of scores, based on the criteria as listed
- Incorporating probability/risk into the final score (multiplying it by impacts)

5. Mitigation Action Development

- a. Process overview
 - i. The action development process includes numerous steps:
 1. Gathering and analyzing existing action ideas (actions from 2013 plan, actions that emerged from capability inventory in spring, other ideas that have emerged in process so far this year).
 2. Generating new action ideas to fill gaps or recognize good work that is already happening
 3. Prioritize actions and hone in on top priorities
 4. Develop actions (identifying costs, timeframes, responsibilities)
 5. Plan for implementation
- b. Work so far
 - i. VEM gathered and prepared a master list of actions from the previous plan and meetings to date, cleaning up language and organizing them by objective
 - ii. At the August Working Group meeting, we gave working groups packets of actions relevant to each objective, and asked them to go through and identify which were worth keeping or changing, and start generating new actions. Most groups spent more time on wordsmithing and adjusting previous actions than generating new ideas.
 - iii. VEM staff has now brought all action ideas (including Working Group ideas from August) into a new master list.
- c. Gathering additional input
 - i. Community Workshop recommended considering several categories of additional input needed to develop a complete and sound list of actions, and involve stakeholders more broadly.
 1. **Broad outreach.** It's important to gather new ideas from people in the field, across the State. The emphasis is not on increasing the number of ideas, but on creating space for people to share great ideas that haven't been captured yet, and to give more people a voice in the process. Engaging organizations and individuals broadly at this stage will also lay the groundwork for involving them in implementation.
 2. **Expert review.** Subject matter experts weigh in on the lists of proposed actions. These experts can identify actions that are missing in their particular fields, and can suggest actions that are not as relevant or important.
 3. **Hazard & Principle Review.** Cross-checking a nearly-complete list of actions against the hazards and principles, to ensure that we've adequately addressed them all.
 - ii. CW introduced several engagement options for gathering this input:
 1. **Online input:** Putting action list online and creating an online form for people to add comments or ideas (good for additional working group feedback and others)
 2. **Expert review:** Identifying subject matter experts for each objective and asking them to review the draft list of actions, revise, add, etc.
 3. **Focus groups:** Bringing a group of stakeholders or experts on a certain topic together for a discussion of the draft actions.

4. **Meeting-in-a-Box:** Preparing a package of materials (agenda, talking points, feedback forms) that leaders can take to their own groups to facilitate a conversation about the actions. Ideal for staff meetings, board meetings, regional convenings, etc.
5. **Traveling posters:** Preparing large-format posters that people could post up in offices, at events, etc. to let stakeholders review and share ideas on their own time.

Steering Committee discussion and reflections about action development and additional engagement:

- Several members expressed caution about working to gather many more action ideas, since we already have a great number and the SHMPPC worked hard to distill that down to a short list of priorities in 2013. The group agreed that the emphasis should be on making room for new voices and seeking out great ideas, rather than going for quantity.
 - The Committee expressed interest in connecting particularly with some groups that have not been well-represented yet – especially the southern part of the state, groups serving vulnerable populations, etc.
 - Some of the 2013 actions were confusing and not written well, and Working Groups spent a lot of time trying to interpret. Committee recommends VEM staff and/or expert review process to significantly clean up and improve list before sending out for further review, to make it as clear and efficient as possible for new people. Committee recommends VEM feel empowered to remove actions that staff members don't think make sense.
 - The Committee recommended being very clear that this process is about *state level actions* when sending it out more broadly, to prevent people from sharing many local needs. At the same time, members recognized the value of hearing about local conditions and needs, and using those to inform the state actions that are needed.
- The Committee was in favor of pursuing all of the engagement strategies that were raised. Community Workshop and VEM will develop a more detailed engagement plan and put this in place over the next few weeks.
 - Expert review up front, to ensure master list of actions is as complete and clean as possible
 - Meeting-in-a-box, which can be distributed to Steering Committee and Working Group members and others interested in hosting/facilitating a conversation
 - Online feedback mechanism, to be shared widely
 - Focus group meetings to specifically look at the principles and whether they have been fully addressed, following on additional input
 - Posters for events or different sites, as requested or as opportunities arise

6. Action Prioritization

a. Prioritization Process

- i. VEM staff shared several models of prioritization from other states and Vermont's 2013 plan, noting that many do not use robust prioritization processes

- ii. VEM and Community Workshop shared quick ranking from the Working Group meetings of some potential criteria (not comprehensive or exacting). Priorities were: overall benefit to Vermont (including co-benefits); addresses high-priority hazard/risk; urgency or vulnerability; cost (\$, time and resources)

Steering Committee discussion and reflections about action prioritization

- The Steering Committee discussed a number of potential criteria and options for ranking, and noted some weaknesses of most approaches.
- The Committee was most interested in a simple “impact-feasibility” matrix that allows actions to be grouped by rough measures of impact and the ability to implement.
- VEM staff will refine the idea and process in preparation for the next Steering Committee meeting.

	High Impact (need and potential impact)	Low Impact
High Feasibility (technical, political, cost/resources)	Top priority	Medium priority
Low Feasibility	Medium Priority	Low priority

7. Next Steps

- a. VEM will incorporate Steering Committee ideas into the new thinking on goals
- b. VEM staff will update hazard ranking to include more quantitative analysis and work the probability into final ranking
- c. Community Workshop and VEM will develop a plan and schedule to conduct more outreach and move through the action development process; they will reach out to Steering Committee members to help host conversations, identify experts, weigh in on actions themselves
- d. VEM will refine the action prioritization process in advance of the next Steering Committee meeting