

OUTER BANKS REGIONAL HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN UPDATE

PUBLIC MEETING #2 - COROLLA, NC

August 29, 2024, 11am, Corolla Public Library

ATTENDANCE

There were seven attendees in person. The following individuals were in attendance:

Deb Spillman, Corolla Fire & Rescue
Olivia Doherty, Currituck County Emergency Management
Mary Beth Newns, Currituck County Emergency Management
Paul Sabadash, Outer Banks Association of Realtors
Meghan Agresto, Resident
Christine Smack, Currituck County
David Stroud, WSP

AGENDA

- Introductions
- Why Plan?
- Project Overview
- Planning Process
- Risk & Vulnerability Assessment Update
- Project Schedule
- Next Steps
- Q & A

WHY PLAN?

David Stroud with WSP facilitated the meeting following the agenda above. David began the presentation with why we plan in the first place. David discussed that the Disaster Mitigation Act (DMA) of 2000 which is codified in 44 CFR 201.6 requires local governments to update their hazard mitigation plans every five years to receive FEMA pre- and post-disaster mitigation funding through the Hazard Mitigation Assistance funding programs. David reviewed some trends in disasters including that we now have more frequent and intense hazard events and greater exposure to risk (people, property and critical infrastructure). In 2023 there were 28 billion-dollar disasters, more than any prior year. Hazard mitigation is a priority for multiple reasons, including that the cost of doing nothing is too high, many events are predictable and repetitive, loss reduction can be effective, cost-beneficial, and environmentally-sound, there are legal and moral responsibilities to prevent disasters, and there are federal funds available to support mitigation. The average benefit-cost ratio for federally funded projects is 6:1.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

David explained that we must follow the DMA planning process and we will integrate Community Rating System (CRS) Activity 510 planning steps into the DMA four-phase planning process to meet the requirements of both programs. The DMA process provides continued eligibility for mitigation funding, guides mitigation activities in a coordinated and economical manner, integrates hazard mitigation with other planning mechanisms, directs future development in a safe manner, and helps make communities more disaster resistant. The CRS program provides policy holders in participating communities with flood insurance discounts based on the number of CRS points the communities earn. The flood insurance premium reductions are community wide.

WSP will ensure that the updated hazard mitigation plan meets all FEMA planning requirements, coordinates with the natural hazards in the updated State Hazard Mitigation Plan, includes natural and

human-caused hazards as identified by the HMPC, incorporates local climate change data and findings, and addresses equitable outcomes.

PLANNING PROCESS

David described the planning process in more detail. Phase 1 has been completed. The HMPC was reconvened with some new members and was asked to attend four meetings, provide input on risk and capability, update mitigation actions, and review plan drafts. HMPC members, especially staff, were also asked to consider ways to involve the public throughout the planning process. To maximize CRS credit and support awareness of the plan, 30 outside stakeholders were invited to participate and provide input. The HMPC suggested including faith-based organizations and adult services.

Phase 2 covers the risk assessment, which includes the hazard identification, the vulnerability assessment, and the capability assessment. A draft of the Risk Assessment is scheduled to be posted by WSP by September 13th for the HMPC to review. The hazards that were addressed in the previous plan were presented and the planning committee reviewed and discussed potential additional hazards. There was a question about whether offshore wind farms pose a risk relevant to the HMP. For flood risk, WSP discussed an alternate methodology for estimating exposure and potential future risk using the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard Freeboard Value Approach. Regarding the asset inventory, David noted that NCEM iRisk data will be used and communities will be asked to review and update their critical facility list; critical facilities will be categorized by FEMA lifeline in the plan update, which may be helpful to communities when preparing FEMA grant applications. For the capability assessment, WSP will update the existing report and request feedback from each community on any additional changes.

Phase 3 involves developing a mitigation strategy by reviewing and updating the plan goals and objectives, evaluating mitigation alternatives, including existing and new projects, and drafting an action plan with prioritized projects. David reviewed different approaches to mitigation, the six FEMA/CRS mitigation categories, and the count of actions by category for each jurisdiction in the existing HMP. In the plan update communities must have at least one action for each natural hazard to meet FEMA requirements and should include a flood-related action for at least 5 of the 6 mitigation categories to maximize CRS credit.

Phase 4 is where the communities must adopt and implement the plan. The communities and HMPC will meet quarterly to review the action plan and look for funding and opportunities to implement projects. It was suggested that the Currituck County working group select one person to lead this effort and set up a recurring call so that quarterly meetings are already scheduled. The plan will continue to be updated every five years.

RISK & VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT UPDATE

David reviewed the Priority Risk Index (PRI) methodology and results. The purpose of the PRI is to categorize and prioritize all potential hazards for the Outer Banks planning area as high, moderate, or low risk. David briefly reviewed current draft findings for the hazard profiles included in the plan update. There were several questions from the public ranging from the base flood elevation and mitigation projects to erosion and vegetation overgrowth of the dunes and in the Corolla area. Several questions were provided by Sam Walker who was not present at the meeting; questions and answers are below.

1. Is there a better way for residents to hear about things like this as opposed to reading about it from Sam Walker. Answer: The Currituck County website and other social media such as Facebook publishes information about the Hazard Mitigation Plan Update and there is a website dedicated to this effort at www.OBX-HMP.com.
2. Why doesn't the RHMP survey reflect Corolla as a distinct area instead of lumping it in with Currituck? Is this stereotypical of the plan? Answer: The planning requirements indicate that we have to look at the either incorporated cities and towns and/or the unincorporated county the same as the FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM).

3. What hazards are being planned for? Are ransomware attacks part of the mix. Answer: A hazard mitigation plan by federal law (44 CFR 201.6) only requires looking at a community's natural hazards. Cyber/ransomware is a human-caused and technological hazard and is generally covered in emergency operations and other plans. It is covered in the present HMP and is covered in this updated HMP.
4. The RHMP survey called out a pretty good sample of hazards to be planned for. Are they all factored into planning or is enunciating them in the survey aspirational to the plan. Answer: The hazards mentioned in the survey are the natural hazards listed in the current and updated RHMP.
5. Almost every hazard mitigation plan has some kind of idea to quickly move people out of harms way. That is tricky in the OBX area because housing is such a problem. Does the RHMP have a plan to move people away from the hazard besides saying, "Get out of here." Answer: The purpose of a hazard mitigation plan is not a plan to evacuate people from OBX and no mitigation plan does that. Evacuation and requiring people to the mainland, is an emergency management function and part of an emergency operations plan. Emergency managers in the OBX area coordinate and hold exercise in the event of a hurricane evacuation.
6. Turning infrastructure off before a looming disaster happens is a common mitigation facet, e.g. it is better to turn the power grid off than to have it be damaged under load. Do utilities in our area publicize that data and does the RHMP factor into it. How will residents be told? Should this be widely publicised now? Answer: This issue is outside the domain of a hazard mitigation plan. Utilities are not controlled any community unless they own a utility and cannot independently tell a utility what to do. There are local messages on websites sometimes addressing property protection measure which indicate to homeowners and business owners to shut off gas and electricity.
7. What is the timeline for when county and state officials/facilities will be shut down for what type of hazard? Should also reflect medical facilities. Answer: Each community makes its own decision about which facilities will be shut down (ferries, bridges, roads, etc.) based on the particular hazard. The hazard mitigation plan does not address this issue. This issue most likely is addressed through an emergency operations plan.
8. Does the RHMP call for drills/tests for specific hazards When are they? Where are the results published? Answer: A hazard mitigation plan is not about drills or tests; those are most likely part of an emergency operations plan. Emergency Managers regularly conduct tabletop exercises for various hazards. A hazard mitigation plan is about implementing mitigation projects to reduce the impacts from future hazards.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

David presented a tentative schedule for the planning process, which includes additional HMPC meetings around September/October and November. The draft plan is due to NCEM in December. The plan must be approved by NCEM and FEMA and adopted by all communities before the current plan expires in June 2025.

NEXT STEPS

David discussed public outreach efforts which includes public meetings facilitated by WSP, a public survey, and an informational flyer. Community staff were asked to post outreach on local websites and social media and consider ways to advertise the plan or bring the survey and flyer to community events. The plan website has been rebooted and can be found at www.OBX-HMP.com.

WSP is working on the risk and vulnerability assessment update and a draft will be posted by September 13th. David noted that input from public meetings will be reviewed, discussed with the HMPC, and incorporated into the plan update. Currently, the public survey has received 379 responses and David encouraged the group to make sure their input has been shared.