

**Hazard Mitigation Planning Meeting - South Hero**  
**February 27, 2025 | 11:00 a.m.**  
**South Hero Town Office and Zoom**

**Attendance:** Kim Julow (Treasurer & former Fire Chief), Sue Arguin (Town Administrator), Martha Varney (Zoning Administrator)

The purpose of this meeting is to review the survey and any results at this point and start the hazard identification and risk assessment update. Shaun reviewed the project timeline. He noted there are concerns about potential FEMA funding changes under the current administration. DOGE had eliminated some contract positions under the BRIC program which funds mitigation planning and project work. The state has not heard of any cuts regarding existing BRIC funding awards issued. Shaun advised continuing work as planned.

### **Survey Results**

- Five people have responded to the community survey so far
- Top hazards identified from respondents included:
  - Wind
  - Snow
  - Infectious Disease
- Lowest hazards of concern identified from respondents included:
  - Landslide
  - Earthquake
  - Hail
- Priority Mitigation projects that respondents would like local, state and federal agencies to focus on:
  - Replace inadequate bridges and culverts
  - Retrofit/strengthen critical facilities such as public works building, fire department, schools, utilities
  - Informing property owners about mitigation options
- Important Actions that could be taken to protect individuals and the community:
  - Preventing loss of life and property
  - Protecting and reducing damage to utility infrastructure (power, water, wastewater)
  - Strengthening Emergency Service

Emergency Information sources residents primarily rely on are cell phones followed by television and radio.

### **Hazard Identification and Risk Analysis**

- The group discussed transitioning to the state's hazard assessment used in the 2023 Vermont Hazard Mitigation Plan. The state format scores each hazard based on *Probability* and *Potential impacts (built environment, people, economy, environment)*
- Each hazard receives a final score:  $\text{Score} = \text{Probability} \times \text{Average of Potential Impacts}$
- The scoring criteria was included in the meeting materials.

### **Hazard Discussion**

The group evaluated which hazards to include in the plan based on local knowledge and history. They reviewed the hazards listed in the previous town mitigation plan and the current state hazard mitigation plan. Shaun noted that all the state identified hazards must be in the local plan. If they are not included then the plan must explain why they weren't included.

- Flood Inundation (lake shore properties are most affected by flooding. Flood of 2011 was worst on record when causeway flooded and many lake shore properties were damaged. The lake elevation set a record that year.)
- Wind (more prevalent and more severe in recent years)
- Snow and ice (decided to separate these. Snow not much of a concern until more recently. Ice storm of 1998 was worse incident but the likelihood of a major ice storm is low. Utilities are privately owned and have taken great steps to mitigate power loss concerns.)
- Extreme heat and cold (despite being near water, concerns about vulnerable populations)
- Invasive species (emerald ash borer very prevalent in the County)
- Wildland fire (grass fires, major forest fires not as much of concern)
- Drought (Not concerned because town is an island)
- Infectious Disease (pandemic, avian flue, seasonal influenza)
- Fluvial (Lake Shore) Erosion (some concern along shore line areas, check with road foreman)
- Landslide (not concerned. No areas in town.)
- Hail (not concerned but has occurred recently without a damage)
- Earthquake (not concerned, small tremors felt on rare occurrences)

#### **Hazards in previous plan to remove:**

- Dam failure (no dams in South Hero)
- Terrorism/WMD/civil disturbance (not required. No incidents in history. Fire response agencies plan and exercise active shooter incidents.)
- Telecommunications failure (to be addressed as secondary effect)
- Sewer service loss (There is no sewer service except individual septic systems)
- Water service loss (limited to village area and addressed as secondary effect)
- Electric service loss (to be addressed as secondary effect)

#### **Climate Change Considerations**

- New FEMA requirements mandate addressing climate change impacts for each hazard.
- The group discussed potential federal changes regarding climate change but decided to follow current requirements unless guidance changes.
- Climate change impacts to be addressed include:
  - Warmer winters (impacts to winter tourism, maple sugar industry, agricultural impacts)
  - Increased wind events (power loss, impacts to public facilities, fiber and cable internet service impacts, economic impacts due to power and internet loss, crop damage, orchard damage, waves and erosion)
  - More rain (flooding concerns especially in spring time)

#### **Local Concerns**

- The sandbar connecting South Hero to the mainland is vulnerable during storms. Sandbar is owned and maintained by state. You could experience snow, wind and ice all in one trip across the sandbar (causeway that links Chittenden County and South Hero over Lake Champlain).
- Transportation options are limited for elderly or mobility-impaired residents. A recent snowstorm left elderly residents unable to leave their homes. Several residents that live on private roads were unable to get out because their roads and driveways were not plowed so the town crew went to them to dig

them out. It could have been from the wind drifting snow onto the roads and driveways. Elderly people who have lived on the Islands for most of their lives were commenting they haven't seen so much snow as we've had this year since they were young.

- Private roads and snow removal are ongoing issues. The town does not maintain private roads.

### **Next Steps**

- The committee will meet again on March 6th to rank the hazards.

- Shaun will send updated materials out to the committee.

- Future meetings will address a review of the town's capacity and capabilities including plans, policies, procedures and how they relate to hazard mitigation. Who is responsible for implementing and enforcing.

### **Additional Information**

- The state is preparing new digital flood insurance maps.

- Franklin, Lamoille, and Orleans counties have draft maps available.

- Grand Isle County maps are not yet available despite being "in the middle of a lake"

- Flood Workmap meetings led by the USGS for local officials are scheduled for March.

The meeting adjourned at 12:30.