

Waterbury Natural Disaster Preparedness Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
3/25/2024

**Opening:** The meeting was held in the Steele Community Room, Waterbury Municipal Center. John Malter called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

**Present:** Kane Sweeney, Select Board representative to the committee, John Malter, Forrest McDonald, Matt Dugan

**Absent:** Joe Wurtzbacher

**Approval of Minutes:** Unanimous approval of minutes at 5:40

**Approval of Agenda:** John motioned to approve agenda; Forrest seconded.  
Vote: Unanimous at 5:43 p.m.

**Business from Previous Meeting:** There was no uncompleted business from the last meeting.

**New Business:**

The next committee meeting is scheduled for April 22.

We were reminded that we have to post the notice of our meetings not only on the town website but also in the local post offices.

The committee congratulated Kane on his reelection as a Select Board member.

There was discussion of future meetings; the last Monday in May is problematic due to Memorial Day. We will try to meet on May 20 instead, pending room availability.

There was discussion about doing the meetings via video for members who cannot attend in person. The committee agreed this was necessary.

Kane volunteered to reach out to Ryan van Tynan, who was appointed to the board but missed the previous meeting and this one.

Kane offered to contact Mame McKee, emergency coordinator for Duxbury to discuss her experiences with last year's flooding.

We then began brainstorming our committee's role and capabilities. Matt suggested perhaps mapping all homes at risk for flooding and concentrating on those. In response to our conversation with Liz Schlegel at the previous meeting regarding communication channels, Matt suggested filtering all natural disaster communication through two/three outlets: WDEV and the town's website/Facebook page. This would involve creating a partnership with WDEV well ahead of any events and agreeing on what this would look like (e.g., hourly reports on the hour).

The committee agreed that, while flooding is most top-of-mind due to recent events, we need to develop our recommendations with all other possible natural disasters in mind. We also agreed that showing progress to the town was important.

The committee discussed that one place to draw a line was between emergency response and cleanup/connection to additional services. We feel much more comfortable and informed about the latter; also, other organizations in the town are addressing the former, specifically the fire department.

Kane mentioned the need for a list of people at the state who are involved with emergency response. He also mentioned the importance of mental health assessment and of places for displaced residents to stay.

The committee agreed that, at a basic level, in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster, a major need is cleanup response, which means volunteers, and last year there were insufficient sustained numbers of volunteers for either flooding event.

This led to a discussion around recruiting volunteers who would stay informed and in contact and would do some training on a year-round basis. We also acknowledged the frustration that some volunteers will feel mucking out the same house they mucked out just a short time ago, and the associated burnout factor due to the knowledge that certain houses will continue to flood and the only option—as financially impossible as it is for some people—is for them to move.

Kane provided some general information on the town's thinking around land use and sewer upgrades as a way of preparing for future flood events.

Kane shared with the committee an infographic he prepared about the phases of emergency response. This involves three main groups/stages from evaluating damage to cleanup to basic needs such as food, water, and housing.

There was discussion about how to ensure that important equipment is returned. We need a better tracking system for items such as humidifiers. We also need a stock of non-perishable supplies available at all times.

The committee brainstormed about how a volunteer corps would stay ready, populated, trained, and motivated. It was suggested that they meet regularly throughout the year. All volunteers would be given branded t-shirts. Groups of volunteers would be led by “block leaders.”

John mentioned the Rotary Club's role in relief for the summer flooding (both mucking and coordinating food delivery).

There was discussion and concern about the idea of the volunteer corps turning into a free labor force, for example, when there's no disaster event and the work turns to preparation such as moving things out of basements or doing waterproofing. There was also concern about waivers for the town if volunteers got hurt doing this work.

Concern about how to keep the corps motivated was balanced by the idea that this work could bring people together in a time of unprecedented isolation.

There was discussion about how to convene monthly volunteer corps meetings, and the idea arose that doing it over coffee at a local business, for example, might be a pleasant way to meet and to keep people motivated.

This led to the reminder that Team Rubicon will be conducting a training at the end of April and that our committee might take advantage of this to learn skills that we can teach to others.

There was the suggestion to make volunteer recruitment the partial responsibility of the “block leaders.”

The committee decided that we’ll need a name for this corps and that a community-wide contest might be appropriate. This naming would include a logo. We would then print t-shirts with the name and logo on them.

The committee discussed doing some press to promote the new effort, including writing a story for the Waterbury Roundabout. Matt volunteered to do this.

Kane suggested that financial support from the Select Board may be possible. John suggested that Rotary Club support may be possible.

There was discussion of a t-shirt logo contest in schools. If this were to happen this school year, it would have to happen quickly, and so we discussed getting in touch with our various school contacts (e.g., Tom Drake) to determine if there might be time to slip a contest into the curriculum.

If the contest were to take place in the fall, memories of the recent flooding would be further in the past than they would be this spring. The committee acknowledged the difficulty of running the contest and obtaining prizes before school lets out this year.

Kane noted that the committee would be best served by making a formal request to the Select Board for permission to organize a volunteer corps. Matt volunteered to write up a description of the proposal and to attend the next Select Board meeting to present the ideas.

The committee agreed that in our next meeting, we need to flesh this idea out and decide on a mission statement.

The committee discussed contest prizes and what local businesses may be able to contribute.

**Adjournment:** At 7:00, there was a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded.  
Vote: Unanimous

**Minutes Submitted By:** Matt Dugan