

Waterbury Natural Disaster Preparedness Committee
Meeting Minutes
9/23/2024

Opening: The meeting was held in the Steele Community Room, Waterbury Municipal Center. The meeting was called to order at 5:32 p.m.

Present: John Malter, Matt Dugan, Bette Lewicke, Stacey Schwarz, Forrest McDonald, Tom Leitz (town manager)

Absent:

Approval of Minutes: Bette moved; Forrest seconded. Unanimous approval of minutes at 5:35.

Approval of Agenda:

Business from Previous Meeting: None.

New Business:

The topic of the meeting was revisions to the Disaster Preparedness Manual and the assignment of tasks to committee members.

Disaster resources list: What resources should live permanently on CReW's website and the town's website? Stacey volunteered to assemble a list that is helpful but not overwhelming.

Tom suggested hiring a town hiring a consultant to help people navigate the resources, particularly FEMA. Matt asked if this could be part of the disaster response coordinator's (DRC) job description.

Tom: State emergency response contacts are contractors representing the state, so "even the state itself admits it can't navigate the system itself.

Stacey: Volunteers could be trained to help with this process.

Tom: FEMA reps are assigned for 120 days then they leave. He has worked with four, the last being the one being by far the most helpful one.

Matt said he would add into the manual that the DRC should train and oversee volunteers who would help navigate the process (with the note that CReW has been doing this and that we have to coordinate with them).

Create a mold information and liability form.

Matt: We have a liability form for the town re: volunteers but when volunteers go in to do mold remediation, there is no form releasing them from responsibility for any remaining mold issues.

A discussion followed regarding what volunteers can truly do alleviate mold issues, with the comparison being made with the practices employed by professional mold remediation companies.

John: Alternative: Make the residents aware of what the mold issues could be.

Tom: Renting dehumidifiers has become five times more expensive compared with pre-flood times. "At some point, you have to say this is a homeowner issue. If you live in a flood plain, you need to own a pump and a dehumidifier." Trash pumps that can pump 20,000 gallons an hour are \$300. A dehumidifier rated for 3000 or 4000 feet is \$300.

There was general agreement that owning these items—when affordable—is a homeowner responsibility. After establishing this policy as a town, perhaps there is a way we can fund these items for households below a certain income threshold.

Our committee suggests providing mold kits to residents but not asking volunteers to do mold removal.

Tom: Dumpster misuse is an issue. Residents are using them for non-flood trash disposal.

Forrest: Is there an issue with broader liability (beyond mold).

Matt: i.e., what if volunteers remove something the homeowner didn't want removed.

Tom: Will check with town's insurance company for language to address this.

Forrest volunteered to update the mold guidance for citizens to be included in the mold kits the town would hand out to affected homes.

The committee agreed that "high-value" jobs should be the ones volunteers are tasked with, not frustrating ones such as mold remediation.

Stacey: Make clear lists of what the volunteers will be responsible for and what homeowners are responsible for.

Tom: Add "removing cars" to that list because when the town has to tow, it's a \$200-\$300 charge to the town. A half-dozen had to be moved from the park-and-ride during the December flood.

The committee agreed that the communication aspect of our work is very important (e.g., informing the public about the importance of dehumidifiers, pumps, and moving cars) but that we need to complete the manual first.

Re: communication, the committee agreed that the communication has to be clear, simple, actionable.

Matt will add to the manual: Basic information sheet re: mold remediation; volunteers will not perform mold remediation. We understand that CReW will likely disagree with this decision.

Meeting with WDEV and communication in general.

A relationship with them where they can brand themselves as “flood central” is potentially good for their relationship with advertisers.

Matt: Suggest we shrink and simplify and be consistent with our messaging by limiting outlets and directing people to those. One goal of the manual is to create a job description for the DRC and so we don’t want this person to be overburdened with any one particular issue, e.g., constant updates on multiple platforms. A consistent, regular communication campaign that takes advantage of the strengths of each medium is optimal. For example:

- The Waterbury Roundabout is good for longer, less time-dependent pieces.
- Front Porch Forum is good for intermediate updates.
- WDEV is good for, perhaps, hourly updates that are not detail-heavy.
- The town’s Facebook page is good for instant updates and links.

Stacey: We can suggest VT Alerts tailored by county.

Matt: What mediums do we recommend be part of the Resources list?

There was agreement on FPF, the Roundabout, the town FB page/Instagram, WDEV. The conversation remains open.

John volunteered to explore a relationship with WDEV.

There are two categories of communication: preparation and response. These require two different approaches.

John suggested a reverse phone tree for use in the event of an impending event. How do we get this information out to vulnerable locations? CReW likely has phone numbers already to start this process.

Stacey: Put certain items into a to-be-considered category for the DRC to decide upon.

Matt offered to put the phone tree as a “other duties” part of the DRC’s job description.

Forrest: Software is available for people to understand what areas will flood based on rainfall. The DRC can assign notifications to households based on the forecast.

Stacey: Suggested different landing pages for before, during, and after the event with different messages on each.

Matt: The part of the manual that helps people prepare is intended to live permanently on the town's website.

Stacey volunteered to break the public preparedness part of the manual down by subject area for public use.

List of Red Cross services to be integrated into the document.

Bette will assemble these details for insertion into the manual.

John's suggestion regarding disaster-information handouts at town meeting.

John will assemble a one-pager for the town report. This will be used as a press release for WDEV and the Roundabout to fulfill CReW's request that we let the community know that the town is actively responding to the ongoing flood situation.

What are Volunteer Corps responsibilities?

Speaking with FEMA, the state, nonprofits: A DRC job or a CReW job? Volunteers with CReW have performed this service in the past. We don't want to step on CReW's toes. Matt will ask CReW. If a DRC responsibility, would this belong to the DRC or volunteers?

Storage of equipment.

John suggested renting a storage unit. Matt asked about the parking lot at the state complex that's been used for hazardous waste. John said it would depend on the level of flooding. John said that the municipal building is inadequate, and the old armory is being used already for storage. Stacey suggested adding this item to the list of things to be considered by the DRC.

Matt will ask Tom about storage locations.

Coordinating the purchase of a vector truck collectively by several towns.

Matt said that Bill Shepeluk reported having tried this in the past, unsuccessfully.

Matt will put this suggestion in the manual as an option.

Dehumidifiers.

Our recommendation to the town is to purchase industrial dehumidifiers in addition to communicating that residents should own their own, more affordable units.

John volunteered to find out what the town has for trash pumps with the idea of inventorying all town resources related to flooding.

John has started the process of talking with solid waste management colleagues about how they are dealing with flood waste. They are doing it like us: dumpsters that trucks cycle through and empty.

Mike Dacey had suggested learning more about the “bagster,” a portable dumpster. John learned that, if they’re available in VT from Waste Management (who do not operate in Vermont), we should consider purchasing them and informed us that trucks the town already owns can hoist these bags, so this might be a solution if Waterbury can source the bags. John said they sell them via Home Depot and Lowe’s. John is pursuing this.

The Red Cross, part II: the social-emotional-physical needs list.

Is this a volunteer corps responsibility? This requires expertise. Can the Red Cross handle this?

Bette: There are steps: damage assessment, then case workers, then mental health resources are available. If the assessment deems the home unlivable, the Red Cross will make housing available.

Bette will design a mental health resources form for distribution to all homes as part of the initial property assessment.

Ribbons or some other sign designating which houses have town equipment.

This issue should be resolved via a folder system (suggested in the manual) where all affected homes get a folder that is continually updated. Two of the current forms include references to town-owned equipment.

Stacey: Is there a software system that could contain all the response information?

Matt: There are a couple of systems that don’t necessarily get along.

Stacey: Will contact Nora from CREW to learn more. As a data specialist, she thinks there may be the possibility of merging platforms.

Vote to adjourn: Unanimous

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 7:00.

Minutes Submitted By: Matt Dugan