

## Waterbury Natural Disaster Preparedness Committee

### Meeting Minutes

02/25/2025

**Opening:** The meeting was held in the Steele Community Room, Waterbury Municipal Center. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m.

**Present:** John Malter, Matt Dugan, Bette Lewicke, Stacey Schwarz and guests Mike Dacey (CReW) and Dr. Lakelyn Taylor, UVM researcher

**Approval of Minutes:**

**Approval of Agenda:**

**Business from Previous Meeting:**

**New Business:**

The topic of the meeting was next steps after submission of the Disaster Preparedness Manual.

Lakelyn introduced herself and her work regarding disaster communication.

Matt talked about the need to start building out the communication strategy in several areas to assist the new Natural Disaster Preparedness and Response Coordinator.

Matt summarized the results of CReW's volunteer survey and emphasized the main point that volunteers felt the experience was very fulfilling and that this will be an important aspect of recruitment for the Volunteer Corps.

John told the committee that he would be speaking briefly and presenting the committee's one-page NDPC update and asking for volunteers to the yet-to-be-established Corps. Mike and John agreed that they would put up a signup sheet that both CReW and the NDPC could use: more specialized construction skills for CReW and more general volunteers for the Volunteer Corps. John and Mike agreed to connect over email to work on a poster and signup sheet.

Lakelyn then asked the committee what would be the most helpful information she could supply to the committee. John answered that we want people in at-risk areas to receive our message ahead of time so they can prepare and then, in the event of a disaster, know what actions to take, and that these people are tuned to a variety of different media.

Lakelyn said one of the most important aspects of communication starts early, well before any disaster, partly to prepare people for which channels the town will use to publish information.

Lakelyn said that the number of channels is not as important as consistency of messaging, i.e., it's OK to have many channels as long as the message is the same, "message convergence."

Matt expressed that, to best guard the NDPRC's time, it's important to make sure the person is not swallowed up by the communication possibilities during a disaster. Bette said that it is typical that disaster response organizations have a coordinator who is separate from the spokesperson.

Lakelyn reported that email is a very popular way in general for people to get emergency and recovery information. VT Emergency Alerts is popular as well, which was confirmed by Mike as shown by the number of people who signed up for them in Waterbury.

Lakelyn said that people also want to find information on a website, perhaps more than social media. Email, alerts, websites, and social media tend to be how people would like to receive information, both nationally in the areas Lakelyn studied and locally. Part of the Waterbury disaster plan, according to Lakelyn, should be a listserv that folks can sign up for. This will help with the issue of outdated email addresses. It should be used for all aspects of disaster communication, from preparation to webinar announcements to disaster response.

Stacey inquired about management software. This initiated a discussion about Monday.com, which CReW uses, and the possibility of the town paying for an expanded version that we could use to bridge the response and recovery efforts. Mike reported that the Vermont Community Foundation paid for a customized version of the software for Vermont communities. Mike said CReW would welcome the town using Monday.com for response to improve the response/recovery effort. He confirmed that this is not a tool for communicating with volunteers. CReW is using Squarespace for its email communication as it came as part of their website package.

Lakelyn offered her ongoing assistance, and John expressed the committee's gratitude.

Lakelyn invited the committee to a presentation she would be giving the following week on her team's research in the Rutland area (Matt attended and has access to the recording.)

There was discussion about the high degree of discussion in town about the amount of snow on the ground and the impending warming temperatures.

Mike Dacey offered that sandbags are an issue in that people want them and can't always get them. Should people buy their own sandbags? Should the town buy them? Stacey offered that people should be responsible for their own sandbags. Matt took the discussion in the direction of how the Volunteer Corps might be able to help proactively, e.g., helping to clear basements before flooding (this idea is in the manual) with the idea that, in a flood, people with cleared basements would receive attention first due to the notion that a cleared basement is a quicker job. Mike offered that sandbags should be an individual responsibility but that the Volunteer Corps (VC) could help those in need, but the biggest issue is that each town handles it

differently and so people are often confused, and in Waterbury, because the Irene response was so thorough there is an expectation of a high level of services. Therefore, Mike urged a uniform message/policy on the part of the town. The committee was in general agreement that there should be a list of things the town will and will not do. The main goal, said Matt, was to help the town work ahead of time so that when disaster strikes, the volunteer efforts/hours can be reduced.

Stacey said she's happy to work with Monday.com to an extent if that is the direction the town wants to go in. Mike offered that he, Nora, and Stacey would get together to talk it over with the idea of clarifying what the ask of the town should be. Stacey said she'd set up the meeting.

Stacey said that, in terms of staying in touch with volunteers, Mailchimp is an affordable solution.

Matt asked Lakelyn what she thought the one most important thing was that the committee should concentrate on once the Natural Disaster Preparation and Response Coordinator (NDPRC) comes on board. She urged us to assume we'll have a flood this summer. This means that job one for the coordinator is to focus on the VC—getting mailing lists, getting in touch, etc.

John said that keeping the VC engaged on an ongoing basis is important and that in the future, the NDPRC could/should be calling the meetings of our committee.

Lakelyn reminded us that the manual is a significant advancement in terms of setting up the NDPRC for success.

Matt suggested that at our next meeting, we should lay out the first six months for the NDPRC in terms of how we can help them.

John thanked Lakelyn and offered an open invitation to attend future meetings. The meeting adjourned at 6:36.

**Vote to adjourn:** As this was not an official meeting, there was no vote to adjourn.

**Adjournment:** Ditto

**Minutes Submitted By:** Matt Dugan