

Mystic River Watershed Steering Committee

Meeting Focus: Municipal Hazard Mitigation Plans

June 14, 2018

Chelsea City Hall, City Council Chamber

Meeting Summary

Meeting in Brief

The Mystic River Steering Committee's June meeting focused on municipal hazard mitigation plans and the larger state and federal context within which those plans are developed. Representatives from FEMA, MA EEA, Arlington, Chelsea and Medford shared their processes for hazard mitigation and municipal climate resilience planning. Other participants also had an opportunity to share relevant updates and announcements. Presentation slides from the meeting are at <https://mysticriver.org/epa-steering-committee> and <https://www.epa.gov/mysticriver/mystic-river-watershed-initiative#MeetingsEvents>. A list of meeting participants can be found at the end of this document.¹ For more information about the steering committee and current efforts to restore the Mystic River watershed, please visit www.epa.gov/mysticriver.

Next Meeting

The next steering committee meeting will take place on October 11 (not September 13 as originally planned) and will focus on the Mystic phosphorous study results and next steps.

Action Items

- EPA – Invite EPA Region 1 Administrator Alexandra Dunn to an upcoming committee meeting.
- EPA and federal partners – Consider how to get the word out to Mystic communities that haven't done the MVP process about the MVP opportunity.

Welcome

Fidel Maltez, Asst. Director of Public Works, and Tom Ambrosino, Chelsea City Manager, welcomed participants to Chelsea noting the progress the city has been making along their waterfront including parks and public access. Patrick Herron and Mel Coté, steering committee co-chairs, hosted the meeting. David Mendelsohn (FEMA) is retiring, Melissa Surette will replace him on the Federal Urban Waters Partnership.

Climate Mitigation and State Hazard Planning Process

Trish Garrigan, coordinator at EPA Region 1 for non-point source / 319 Program, facilitated the portions of the meeting focusing on climate mitigation and state hazard planning processes. She noted the many connections between hazard and climate planning, mentioning that Superstorm Irene was a wake-up call for many and that municipalities need a hazard mitigation plan to get FEMA dollars.

Federal Hazard Mitigation Planning

Melissa Surette, Senior Planner, Risk Analysis Branch, Mitigation Division, FEMA, provided an overview of hazard mitigation planning under FEMA. See her slides for detail on the funding application process.

¹ This summary was prepared by the Consensus Building Institute.

She began by defining hazard mitigation as any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate the long-term risk to human life and property from hazards. Hazard mitigation activities may be implemented prior to, during or after an event. They are most effective when based on an inclusive, comprehensive, long-term plan that is developed before a disaster occurs. FEMA focuses on natural hazards. To qualify for FEMA funding, a municipality must understand their hazards and associated risks and take steps to make their community disaster resilient.

FEMA has two grants relevant to hazard mitigation work:

- (1) Pre-disaster mitigation grants available nation-wide to states and municipalities,
- (2) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), which becomes available after a federally declared disaster.

FEMA has grant guidelines for tribes, states, and municipalities. The process is similar for each: (1) a planning process including multiple stakeholders, (2) a risk assessment, (3) development of a mitigation strategy. The strategy needs to be updated every five years and takes about a year to update. Places with expired plans are ineligible for FEMA grant funding. Melissa noted that nature-based solutions and green infrastructure can be included, linked to development in hazard prone areas and changing future conditions. Drought can also be included. Participants noted that drought is a topic that might need some attention in this area.

FEMA offers technical assistance for updates to hazard mitigation plans (contact Sarah White for more information). FEMA is pleased that the Massachusetts hazard mitigation plan is also going to be a climate adaptation plan. The hazard mitigation conversation is broadening with linkages to climate adaptation planning.

Massachusetts Hazard and Climate Adaptation Planning

Margot Mansfield, Climate Change and Coastal Hazards Analyst, MA EOEEA, discussed MA EOEEA and MEMA's new integrated climate mitigation and hazard planning process and the MVP program. She mentioned that Resilientma.org is the climate change clearinghouse for MA.

The governor signed Executive Order 569: An Integrated Climate Change Strategy for the Commonwealth in 2016. The order included guidelines to integrate adaptation into the state hazard mitigation plan. The new plan will be submitted to FEMA later this summer following several rounds of stakeholder engagement. See Resilientma.com for more on this. The order also included incentives for communities to develop their own plans, and the Environmental Bond Bill allocates money for climate change planning.

The Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program was designed to help address the recent, ongoing flooding and storm-driven impacts been seen in MA. It provides financial and technical assistance to municipalities. The MVP program has just completed its first year, in which with \$1.1M, 20% of cities and towns (~74 communities) were awarded completion of the planning phase. Another 82 municipalities have been awarded that planning grant for this coming year. The second round of funding is for \$5M for both planning and action grants. The state is doing an evaluation of the program following year one. Some Mystic watershed communities have completed received MVP designation, and five new ones are beginning the planning phase this year.

- *MVP Planning Grants* - Planning grants provide technical support in the form of funding to help municipalities hire technical experts and a model process developed by the Nature Conservancy for an intensive one-day session. Participants in local MVP workshops identify hazards, strengths and vulnerabilities, then develop a list of priority actions and a timeline. Municipalities that complete the process or get a pass are designated an MVP community. To maintain that designation, they need to make yearly progress on implementing their priority goals. The second round of planning grants offers more guidance on types of stakeholders to invite, includes agencies as expert advisors, and provides funding for particular needs (e.g. environmental justice or seasonal populations). Municipalities may apply together.
- *MVP Action Grants* – These grants help municipalities implement top priorities identified during their planning processes. Only communities who attained MVP designation following their planning process are eligible. Thirty-four FY18 grants were awarded, ranging from \$8K-400K. Applicants need to provide at least 25% matching (which can be cash or in-kind staff time). They have a preference for nature-based solutions.

Participants briefly discussed whether there are some agencies that can approve climate change-related plans and others that are avoiding that terminology. Those present indicated that they use a variety of terms for future change including climate change and the changing environment, and that they would never not fund community plans because of the use of the words climate change.

Municipal Perspectives and Panel Discussion

Representatives of three Mystic River watershed municipalities that went through the MVP program shared their experiences with the group.

Arlington

Nat Strosberg, Senior Planner for the Arlington Department of Planning and Community Development spoke about their process. Arlington hired Kleinfelder as their technical support.

Arlington has high levels of public participation, but hadn't had a focused discussion on climate change or weather-related hazards. Because it is a town-meeting town, building momentum and shared understanding was important. The MVP process helped the planners bring people together on this important topic. There were 30 participants in the MVP core group including engineers, fire, police, conservation, energy, recycling, health and human services representatives, MyRWA, local business owners, environmental committee members, and the town manager. The town manager was an essential participant. They decided to prioritize addressing flooding caused by Mill Brook. This goal works for people with many different interests (ecological, flooding, access), and with strong community engagement the city is now working to identify consultants with a \$399K MVP action grant. Arlington identified their 25% match from Community Preservation Act funds.

Key lessons from the process:

- Climate adaptation discussions will need to be regional.
- Having participants from many departments and areas of expertise is important. Sitting down together across departments makes it easy to identify problems. For example, the fire and police representatives helped identify an infrastructure problem (clogging drains in a particular intersection) that was causing flooding.
- Sea level rise will directly impact Arlington because of the Amelia Earhart dam.
- The communication of information is important. Information should not just be technical.

- People who are loath to discuss climate change may be able to work together to address major hazards. In Arlington, everyone could understand and work to address major flooding impacts.

Chelsea

Alexander Train, Assistant Director, Planning and Development spoke about Chelsea's MVP process experience. Chelsea used MAPC and Chelsea GreenRoots as their technical experts.

Chelsea had completed an exhaustive critical infrastructure vulnerability assessment prior to the workshop. Given that infrastructure vulnerability was known, the MVP process allowed the city to delve into social and socioeconomic vulnerabilities. As hosts to jet fuel for the airport, contaminated sites and other critical infrastructure, the MVP dialogue focused on educating the public with local examples and discussing how to reduce vulnerabilities that come from those toxic sites. Outcomes included prioritizing enhanced stormwater management at the produce terminal (e.g. a berm) and hardening the shoreline around the jet fuel storage. The City just submitted a grant to CZM to begin addressing those two priorities. The Chelsea City Council and City manager have been strongly supportive of this work.

Key lessons from the process:

- The MVP participants from the community came to very similar conclusions as the planning staff and city leadership. Their thinking was surprisingly closely aligned.
- Key local topics (such as critical infrastructure in Chelsea) will be topics of conversation, even though they might have already been officially dealt with.
- Simplify everything. Simplify the content presented to the MVP participant audience. Simplify subject matter so it works for the general public.
- Communicate effectively. The Chelsea MVP session was held in both English and Spanish.

Medford

Alicia Hunt, Director of Energy and Environment, spoke about Medford's MVP process. Medford used the Nature Conservancy as their consultant.

Medford was already working on a climate vulnerability process before the MVP process. The MVP core team included the sustainability director, emergency manager, mayor, and Tufts grad student interns. Organizing the MVP workshop raised awareness in the community about climate work already being done and allowed the mayor to mandate that department heads and other key stakeholders show up for the day. They had participation from the police, Wynn, Tufts, Century Bank, Verizon, Comcast, and the Cummings Foundation, among others in a group of 60 participants. The advanced legwork was significant, but colleagues in other communities who had done MVP planning sessions helped Medford staff find the right contacts in companies like Verizon. Department heads saw the important people attending and it got their attention, so they showed up. The Director of Health, who is responsible for the Medford hazard mitigation plan used the MVP workshop as part of the stakeholder engagement for town hazard mitigation efforts, and as a result of the effort there is talk of revising a plan from 2013 that didn't mention climate.

Kleinfelder produced flooding maps for Medford, and the City has received funding to incorporate climate change into their open space plan. It has also received funding to look at green and grey solutions to funding. There is huge progress on integrating climate and hazard planning, and the MVP planning grant was instrumental in making those connections.

Key lessons from the process:

- *Too much in one session* – There is a difference between conducting a vulnerability assessment to understand your vulnerabilities and developing an adaptation plan to address those vulnerabilities. Doing both in one day or process was too much. Both take a year or more to do well. Since Medford had spent 18 months identifying vulnerabilities, they started with work they had done showing flood maps, heat information, weather information, and predictions of how weather will impact people in Medford.
- *A workshop report is not the same as City priorities* - The required MVP report on the workshop should describe what happened that day and what people prioritized. There is difference between a report on a workshop and a City's priorities and plans. Workshop outcomes are not the same as the City's priorities. Some of the outcomes from conversations did not even make sense (e.g. participants confused different bodies of water), while other key topics that need to be municipal priorities like heat were hardly discussed, while many priorities from the workshop are on short-term emergency communication rather than long-term action. The work was done very fast and was not vetted. The City needs to subsequently review the work that was done and decide how the outcomes fit with City priorities. In Medford, the Energy and Environment office will review the outcomes and decide how to proceed.
- *The number of workshop participants matters* - With 60 people at a workshop, it wasn't possible to learn the outcomes of all the small group discussions. It also wasn't possible to invite people from abutting communities given the size of the group, though they had hoped to invite some neighbors.
- *We aren't yet effectively engaging underserved populations* – The listening session [Alicia – is this 30 person different from the 60 person one? Please clarify] attracted primarily white upper-middle class participants despite advertising translation, child care, snacks.

Medford is hoping to find funding for a climate champions liaison program. Boston is educating people to give presentations. Medford wants to educate local thought leaders who already have standing about climate change, send them out, then have them tell city leaders what they learn as an iterative process.

Full Group Discussion:

Participants shared their thoughts and asked questions about the MVP program. Many participants who shared comments had attended one or more MVP planning session.

- Residents and people from within city departments bring a wealth of expertise and local knowledge to the MVP discussions, which makes them rich opportunities for learning.
- The topics that are discussed vary widely, and a municipality may neglect entire subject areas that are crucial given the brevity of the experience.
- The choice of consultant has an enormous impact on the content, tone and quality of the workshops (what information was presented, facilitation style, final report).
- Towns should look for who uses public space when inviting people to events like MVP workshops. These names could be found in special use and recreational permits.
- Suggestion that it might make sense to offer sequential phases of the planning grant where the first workshop is for staff and consultants, the second for the public, then the work comes back to staff and consultants with a final presentation to the public.
- Massachusetts has the Environmental Joint Powers Act, which allows communities to join together to make a legal entity that can receive public money and spend joint funding. This might help communities that have a hard time making the match and encourage regional

solutions to environmental problems. For example, after the floods in 1996, eight Mystic River Watershed communities joined together.

- Municipalities should look for joint opportunities to work on stormwater and the need for water quality benefits linked to MS4.

Integrating State Hazard Mitigation Plans with Other Watershed Efforts

Patrick Herron, MyRWA, said MyRWA is now working on climate and especially climate-related initiatives that need to occur across municipal boundaries. MyRWA has begun working with Julie Wormser and is looking for synergies across communities related to climate change. Patrick discussed the new stormwater permit going into effect in July that will require action as a new opportunity for people focused on climate and public works to work together. He noted a variety of shared regional concerns including the desire for open space, the desire for flood storage, the Amelia Earhart Dam's resilience. He invited people to engage with MyRWA on regional climate issues and said he expects that enhancing climate resilience in the Mystic will take several decades and many activities.

Announcements, Updates, and Funding Opportunities

- Medford is hiring a new city engineer.
- A gaming commission grant will cover the cost of engineering and permitting work for the south gate connector.
- EPA announced the Report Cards for 14 segments of the Mystic River Watershed! **The Mystic River (proper) received an A-**, based on three years of rolling data. MyRWA encourages people to boat. Recent improvements include places like the area in Medford where Meetinghouse Brook joins the river and the water quality went from a C- to a B.
- EPA is working to get a Mystic Ambassador onboard soon in partnership with NPS and Groundwork Somerville to advance Mystic River Watershed Steering Committee goals.

Meeting Participants

Name	Affiliation
Shabnam Bista	Medford E+E
Karen Buck	Friends of the Malden River
Mel Cote	USEPA
Conrad Crawford	Groundworks Somerville
Catherine Daly Woodbury	Cambridge DPW
Seth Daniel	Chelsea, Everett, Charlestown newspapers
Bevin Engelward	MIT Superfund
Ona Ferguson	The Consensus Building Institute
Trish Garrigan	EPA Region 1
Patrick Herron	MyRWA
Andrew Hrycyna	MyRWA
Alicia Hunt	Medford
Rachel Kelly	City of Everett
Jen Letourneau	Cambridge DPW
Fidel Maltez	Chelsea DPW
Margot Mansfield	MAEEA
Lise Marx	MWRA
Danya Mattes	Medford
Carolyn Meklenburg	Medford E+E
David Mendelsohn	FEMA
Claire Moss	Wakefield
Leilani Mroczkowski	GreenRoots
Karen Pelto	Mass DEP NRD
Tony Rodolakis	Amec Foster Wheeler
Matt Shuman	Watertown
Melissa Surette	FEMA
Ivey St. John	CWC
Nat Strosberg	Arlington
Alex Train	Chelsea
Kathy Vandiver	MIT SRP + CEHS
Caitlyn Whittle	USEPA
Julie Wormser	MyRWA consultant

For questions regarding this meeting summary, please contact Caitlyn Whittle at EPA (whittle.caitlyn@epa.gov) or Ona Ferguson at the Consensus Building Institute (ona@cbi.org).