

Waterbury Natural Disaster Preparedness Committee
Meeting Minutes
10/28/2024

Opening: The meeting was held in the Steele Community Room, Waterbury Municipal Center. The meeting was called to order at 5:39 p.m.

Present: John Malter, Matt Dugan, Bette Lewicke, Stacey Schwarz, Forrest McDonald, Kane Sweeney (Select Board liaison)

Approval of Minutes: Unanimous approval of minutes at 5:41.

Approval of Agenda:

Business from Previous Meeting: Revision of the NDPC manual.

New Business:

The topic of the meeting was review of the revised Disaster Preparedness Manual and final revisions of the first official draft.

Kane: There is a job description being written for the position of Natural Disaster Preparation and Response Coordinator (NDPRC) by the Select Board (SB). Kane suggested that the Select Board wanted this person to already be a member of the town apparatus such as a fire department member, a person would serve on a “part-time volunteer” basis and would receive a stipend for doing preparedness work and when disaster strikes, the person would go into a full-time mode accompanied by a commensurate pay rate.

Matt: So, this would be a part-time employee that gets ramped up?

Kane: That would be the idea. This is an idea only at this time, per Select Board deliberation. CREW has expressed many times the desire to be out of the disaster-response business. So the coordinator would be responsible for the updating of the manual in the future. It will be the job of the Select Board to outline what the town does and where CREW takes over.

Matt: We’ll want to consider in the future what our committee’s relationship will be with the new NDPRC.

John: What is the time frame for bringing the NDPRC on board?

Kane: As soon as possible. This is related to reviewing the manual after CREW has submitted their edits and suggestions. The model for the relationship between the NDPRC and the NDPC is that of a volunteer fire department with the committee being the lieutenants to the NDPRC where the chief makes the decisions at the end of the day but listens to their officers on vital issues.

Forrest and John agreed with this model.

Matt expressed that a future concern will be better defining the relationship between the NDPC and the NDPRC so as to maximize the working relationship.

John: What about the position of grant writer?

Kane: No update. The state has \$90 million to dole out but has a quarter-billion in requests.

Forrest: Knows a grant writer who he will talk to about the position.

John: Has continued to research the “bagster” but does not have a local source as yet. The search goes on.

Stacey: Will follow up with Nora regarding merging emergency response software platforms.

There was a short discussion about flood alert software. Kane offered that there is a NOAA map available for Waterbury that shows where flooding happens based on the height of the rivers, but it only updates every 30 minutes, which is not often enough during a flood.

Forrest: The town could put in its own measuring system, correct?

The committee had a brief discussion on the process of officially releasing the manual to the public, starting with CReW. John suggested funneling through Tom Leitz.

Kane: CReW is not an arm of the local government. Without CReW, FEMA assistance would have been nonexistent. FEMA requires the establishment of a nonprofit for long-term recovery, hence CReW. The reason for involving CReW in the manual editing process is related to their experience, but the NDPC has the final say on all edits because at some point the SB will call on John to appear and to answer the question, “What is your recommendation?” regarding the document that was final-edited by the NDPC.

The committee was in agreement that, should a flood occur in the interim, i.e., before the manual is approved and a NDRPC hired, the town should defer to CReW’s leadership, should CReW still be interested in leading flood response. In other words, the NDPC does not recommend putting in place a partially-finished list of recommendations over an already-established process.

Kane: Has discussed with Tom how to train a volunteer corps. We could flood a house before the fire department later burns it.

Matt: When John passes the manual along, as the person who’s doing the editing, two requests for CReW: Please agree on all suggestions before sending back to us (versus individuals marking

it up separately with potentially contradictory comments and multiple strikethroughs) and please avoid vague suggestions that require follow-up; concentrate on to-dos.

Forrest: Let's release this as a pdf to avoid the "track changes" issue and limit the feedback to full comments.

Matt: Re: a recent manual edit: The current communication going out to households is not clear that the volunteers have no specialized skills, with the result being that residents who are capable of helping stand by. This includes young and fit people. Therefore, the revised assessment form addresses this.

The committee agreed that residents likely would be willing to help and that the volunteer corps can bring them suits and equipment and manage them as they join the cleanup.

Bette suggested more inclusive language for this section (i.e., revising and further defining any "able-bodied" language).

John: Where will we store supplies?

Kane: When Waterbury Ambulance moves, there will be an available building well out of the flood plain. This is in the firehouse in Waterbury Center. Response supplies would go in one bay and the firetruck in the other. He would not recommend the building be used as the command center.

The committee spent some time reviewing flood maps and sharing general comments.

John: Are there other locations where the town can set up stream gauges?

Kane: The town is open to suggestions and is in the middle of a study and awaiting recommendations.

Matt mentioned that he had attended a recent UVM presentation regarding the university's geospatial technologies department and their work with towns locally and around the country. He asked if there was a town wish list that could be presented to that group. Kane answered that current needs were being addressed via a contract with a company doing similar work. They will release their results early in the new year.

Matt brought up the issue of watershed pollution, a large problem that's under-considered in a flood. There's a role for the committee in helping people understand the issue and to offer help in moving things proactively. John mentioned that at the last hazardous waste disposal day, people brought in flood-damaged chemicals and other materials.

Kane suggested textmygov as a way to make paperwork available, including the assessment form with the language about residents assisting in the effort.

John: We have to be proactive in getting people prepared and moving things well before disaster strikes.

Matt: This communication is on the list of next steps after the final editing and approval of the manual.

Vote to adjourn: John motioned that we adjourn. Forrest seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 6:49 p.m.

Minutes Submitted By: Matt Dugan