

Waterbury Natural Disaster Preparedness Committee
Meeting Minutes
12/09/2024

Opening: The meeting was held in the Steele Community Room, Waterbury Municipal Center.

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

Also Present: Mike Dacey, CReW Executive Director

Approval of Minutes: Unanimous approval of minutes.

Approval of Agenda: Unanimous approval of agenda.

Business from Previous Meeting: Revision of the NDPC manual based on comments from Tom Leitz and CReW.

New Business:

John reported on Winooski Flood Resilience Roundtable; many (45) towns converging around a set of similar concerns and expectations around how we adapt to flooding going forward.

John put together a first draft of one-pager for Town Meeting Day about what the town is doing via the NDPC.

Bette moved that we discuss the possible upcoming flood event (snow, then rain, which would cause considerable snow melt), due for the middle-late part of the week of 12/9/24. The consensus was that the available information indicated that this there was a good chance this would become an emergency.

Kane updated the committee regarding what the town was doing to prepare. There was considerable discussion about snow and rain and temperature levels and what they meant for a possible event.

There was also considerable discussion about how much to share with residents, with John remarking that, in the light of the uncertainty of the forecast, we do not want to scare people.

The committee discussed the job description for the Natural Disaster Preparedness and Response Coordinator. Matt echoed Tom Leitz's comment from the previous summer that we were seeking a unicorn because we are asking someone to be available for large amounts of time on short notice and this did not seem realistic for, say, a retired person. Kane assured the committee that the job description was written around the idea that a current town employee would step into the position, leaving behind regular duties during emergency times, and earning an additional stipend for the duration of the emergency response period.

Mike summarized CReW's role for the committee—funding, service area, organizational status.

Mike announced that the CReW's comments on the Natural Disaster Preparedness Manual were now available. Matt said that, depending on the number and depth of changes to be incorporated, revision might take until late January. Mike said that changes were minor.

John brought up the issue of equipment storage. Kane mentioned that storage is no longer an issue; there is space available at the site of the former Waterbury Rescue building, which, conveniently, is also near the town sand pile on high ground.

There was discussion of a sandbagging machine; town employees have filled bags, and Mike said it is relatively easy to set up a sandbagging apparatus (versus buying one at potentially considerable cost). Prefilling sandbags is happening and will continue but the material that holds the sand is UV-sensitive and so the sandbags must be stored out of the sun.

John mentioned a skirting material ("quick dams") that expands when water contacts it. Mike said they worked in some but not all circumstances. Mike would encourage residents to have them on hand because they take up very little room so they can be purchased and stored with no flood on the horizon.

John asked how our committee might help with upcoming events. Kane said that by far, the Select Board wants the manual.

Matt mentioned that the relationship between the NDPC and the new Preparedness and Response Coordinator is an important one to define and nurture so that communication and coordination is smooth, not only for the current board members and soon-to-be-hired coordinator but also for future individuals in these roles, as confusion about responsibilities and authority can lead to consternation.

Regarding John's draft of the NDPC update for Town Meeting Day, Kane reported that all annual report content is due by Feb. 5.

Kane reported that the town's new Text My Gov number would be announced on Dec. 10, 2024. Residents can text the number and the text is sent to the necessary department head, which will soon include the Response Coordinator.

John asked what CReW expected from us regarding the possible flooding. Mike responded that CReW wanted to understand the NDPC's level of preparedness. There was agreement that there is currently a gap which CReW and the NDPC and the town are not filling; there is a handoff that has not yet been completed. The NDPC's job is to take over response duties from CReW/build the infrastructure for emergency response. John said that we are not prepared to provide a cadre of volunteers (his letter for inclusion in the town report is the first public announcement for people to become members of the new Volunteer Corps). Mike said, in the event of an

emergency, that CReW would like to see a “presence” from the NDPC if for no other reason than the opportunity to gain experience because CReW cannot offer the depth of services it provided in the summer of 2024. Mike said that he would need to check with CReW’s board about his possible availability for a flooding event. He did not anticipate an issue with this, but all agreed that this is not something we want to rely on going forward. Volunteers are the biggest need.

John asked where CReW has gotten its volunteers in the past. Mike said some just show up but that CReW also has an email list and social media accounts that they use to recruit volunteers.

Matt said that the elephant in the room is that the volunteer resources simply are not there yet, that our committee has done its best to prepare but that momentum was stalled by the flooding of 2024 and that our committee turnover has been significant in the 11 months of our existence. He cautioned against setting expectations if flooding occurs before the process is complete. “We just need some more time to get organized.” The NDPC and CReW and the town are all making great progress; we simply have not finished the job yet. The bright side is that many individuals have a degree of experience in dealing with flooding issues and so a patchwork response can be at least somewhat helpful.

Mike expressed the irony that the more events we have, the more experienced we all are but the fewer volunteers show up.

Kane re-emphasized that the approval of the Preparedness and Response Coordinator and the completion of the manual would be the most helpful steps at this point. The committee agreed that, under this model, the job description made sense and voted to support it.

Stacey offered to edit the manual based on CReW’s edits.

The goal is to approve the revised manual at our next meeting.

Regarding the potential flooding, Kane said that the town’s responsibility is to issue warnings of water intrusion. He also said he would work with the Select Board to put out a call for volunteers (the missing piece at present).

Matt asked about the case management software and who would take on that aspect of the response. The NDPC would generate language for volunteer calls and pass on to the town for posting.

Mike said that canvassing would not likely be the most effective use of volunteer time; better to wait for a “cluster of calls.” “All the pathways for water have changed in the past year.” Culverts have been hastily rebuilt for traffic flow.

Bette offered that if her time is not spoken for by the Red Cross, she would be available to serve as a volunteer recruiter.

There are no extra phones available at the municipal building; volunteers would use their own phones.

Mike said a very efficient response effort would focus on contacting previously-affected people. In addition, FEMA flood maps provide a good indication of who might be affected.

Kane said that last summer, the state Emergency Operations Center was evacuated due to rising waters, rendering communication with them limited.

Comments on John's town meeting document:

John looks at it as an "awareness thing" and a request for volunteers for future events (the establishment of the Volunteer Corps). Matt had three comments: Inclusion of phone numbers for organizations mentioned, inclusion of a very brief description of what our committee is and where we are at present, and an invitation to the public to attend our meetings.

Stacey provided feedback on Monday.com and reminded the committee to see her comments. Mike offered that it would be worthwhile for CREW to provide feedback on their experience with the utility. "It is not a perfect system, but it is working." "It is really a project management tool." There was discussion about the benefits and drawbacks of the system.

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

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at approximately 6:34 p.m.

Minutes Submitted By: Matt Dugan