

Summary of Meeting 7
Citizens Advisory Committee
Greenwich Bay Special Area Management Plan
Wednesday, January 7, 2003 6:30-8:30 PM
Natural Hazard Mitigation Meeting
Warwick Sewer Authority, RI

At the seventh meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee for the Greenwich Bay SAMP, guest speakers discussed the natural hazard issues in the Greenwich Bay area. The members also discussed potential policies and regulations for mitigating these issues in the SAMP. A handout summarizing the chapter is available online at the GB SAMP website.

Hazard Mitigation

Pam Pogue of the RI Emergency Management Agency spoke about the federal, state and municipal hazard mitigation strategies and requirements.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has mandated states and municipalities to develop natural hazard mitigation plans in order to receive pre- and after-storm funds. The plan must show documentation of public involvement, establishment of a local committee with broad stakeholders and have the plan adopted into municipal codes.

FEMA is offering a \$300 million grant for pre-disaster mitigation activities. There is a \$4 million cap on grants to municipalities and states. In order to receive these funds, municipalities must have a hazard mitigation plan in place and provide a 25% match in resources.

FEMA is focusing its funding on repetitive loss properties. Warwick ranks second highest in RI under that category. FEMA will provide funding for retrofits and/or razing structures. They do not fund construction of concrete structures anymore for reducing hazards. FEMA provides heavily subsidized insurance rates. However, there is currently a Congressional bill that would deny coverage after two flooding events within a ten-year period.

Warwick and East Greenwich are in the process of developing their hazard mitigation plans for areas above Mean High Water (MHW) and inland. There is a void from MHW to the Bay. The SAMP can play a significant role in identifying natural hazard mitigation actions below MHW.

The two most expensive storm costs in RI are debris removal and downed electrical lines. An example of pre-disaster mitigation action was offered – Pawtuxet inventoried its trees near power lines and government buildings. They then worked with the power company to clear trees in advance of storms. CRMC can play a role in allowing limited tree trimming without the need for permits.

Cleaning debris in the water is a major issue. FEMA doesn't insure structures below MHW, and boats don't have to carry insurance. Some marina operators require boat owners to have insurance, but it is difficult to enforce or prove. Maritime law places responsibility on the last party to touch a vessel, so marinas are hesitant to provide towing services due to potential liability. Another issue is that areas for depositing waste have not been identified. There are two options – declare areas that allow debris storage or identify areas not to receive debris. FEMA has in the past asked marinas to accept oil waste in exchange for FEMA removing the materials for free.

A common problem in the municipalities is frequent approvals for structural variances from the state building code (SBC). Zoning boards and building officials need to be educated on the importance of strict building codes for mitigating hazards.

CAC Recommendations/Comments

Policies:

- Offer a three day course for municipal officials on the importance of proper structures to mitigate hazards.
- Restrict variances in V & A flood zones (strengthen municipal enforcement).
- No extension of public utilities to Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA) sites.
- Pilings need to be higher to withstand the 100/50 year flood.
- Modify rules of FEMA for marinas to accept debris & oils - FEMA remove for free.
- Good Samaritan legislation to allow marinas to assist in towing boats.
- Larger window for marinas to clear debris in concentrated loss areas (30 days!).
- Declare emergency status - coverage for clean-up (48 hours - 7 days).
- Require marinas to update their facilities when they apply for expansions.
- V zone construction standards for marinas (new, expanding or extensive upgrade).
- Debris should include sunken vessels and materials on wetlands and the open water.
- Special permit for public to remove debris.
- Gas tanks in V zone should be required to be above ground.
- Link to emergency plan for debris sites and equipment.
- Purchase land in hazard areas – identify the priority sites.

Recommendations:

- Insurance for boats (need proof) - marinas mandate it but hard to prove.
- Develop partnerships between municipalities, state and businesses in prevention and protection.
- Improve communications between the municipal EMA director and NMFP. This will allow for tracking damage and providing the needed response.
- Remove boats from water before the storm if they can be properly protected and stored.
- Letters of permission (LOP) for tree trimming near homes and power lines – LOP can avoid the need for permits. This is currently available, so there is a need to educate the public.
- Sewer pumps need to be addressed in flood zones.

- Identify funds to place utility infrastructure underground.
- Don't repeat the FEMA rule that allows rebuilding if 50% of the structure remains.

Action Items

- ? CRMC will revise the draft Hazard Mitigation Chapter based on feedback provided at the CAC meeting.
- ? CRMC will invite guest speakers to the Economic Investment CAC meeting.
- ? CAC members will inform CRMC/CRC of opportunities to engage citizen groups in the watershed.
- ? CRMC will invite the Narragansett Indian Tribe to speak at the CAC meeting on February 4.

Next Meeting

The CAC will meet next on January 21 from 6:30 – 8:30 pm at the Warwick Sewer Authority. The focus of the discussion will be on reviewing the Economic Investment chapter.

Attendees

CAC Members

Rich Langseth, Buttonwoods Bay Committee
 Carol Fritz, Cedar Tree Point Assoc.
 Catherine Murphy, Defenders of GB
 Jack Early, Defenders of GB
 Karen Way, Buttonwood Beach Garden Club
 Leah Robinson, Buttonwoods Bay Comm.
 Steve Insana, Buckeye Brook Coalition
 John Williams, Warwick Cove Marina
 Elaine Trench, EG Historic District
 Commission
 Nancy Dickerman, Harbor Commission
 Ron Bethel, Warwick Marina Alliance
 Dave Richardson, Chipiwanoxet N. Assn.

Individual Citizens

Lincoln Ross, Cedar Tree Point Assoc.
 Michelle Komar, Buckeye Brook Coalition
 Linda Green, URI Cooperative Extension
 Leah Robinson, Buttonwoods Bay
 Commission
 Neil Ross, Chipiwanoxet
 Lee Steitz, Marine Environmental Studies,
 Warwick School Dept.
 Sharon Fitzgerald, Old Buttonwoods

Management Staff & Technical Committee

Michael Tikoian, CRMC Chair
 Grover Fugate, CRMC Ex. Director
 Virginia Lee, URI Coastal Resources Center
 Glenn Ricci, URI Coastal Resources Center
 Michael Campana, URI CRC