




Howard County

Internal Memorandum

Subject: Administrative testimony on the Resolution adopting the Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan

To: Lonnie R. Robbins
Chief Administrative Officer

From: Ryan Miller, 
Director of the Office of Emergency Management

Date: December 17, 2018

Council Resolution No. ___ -2019 adopts the Howard County Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan (the “Plan”). Previous Plans have been adopted by the passage of Council Resolution No. 112-2004 and Council Resolution No. 22-2013.

Mitigation is the effort to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters. In order for mitigation to be effective we need to take action now—before the next disaster—to reduce human, environment, and financial consequences later. Dollars spent today on mitigation projects will significantly reduce the demand for future dollars during by decreasing the need for emergency response, recovery, repair, and reconstruction. In fact, according to the National Institute of Building Science’s 2017 Interim Report: Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves, mitigation funding can save the nation \$6 in future disaster costs, for every \$1 spent on hazard mitigation. Furthermore, a strong mitigation program will lessen the threat to life safety from natural hazards.

The Plan is a strategic plan that proposes actions to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from future natural disasters. It is the representation of Howard County’s commitment to reduce risks from natural hazards and is meant to serve as a guide for decision makers as we commit resources to reducing the effects of natural hazards. Local level hazard mitigation plans also serve as the basis for the State to provide technical assistance and to prioritize project funding. The Plan covers the entire County, and all natural hazards that the County could potentially experience.

The Federal Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000^a requires that a local government must have a mitigation plan approved in order to receive Hazard Mitigation Grant Program project grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. While, we are required to have an approved plan every five (5) years in order to be eligible for funding, the Plan does not obligate the County to fund any specific hazard mitigation projects. Instead the Plan acts as a guide for Howard County mitigation projects, as well as can help guide the spending of mitigation grant funds received by the County.

The last Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan was passed by the Council in 2013. The 2018 Plan update provided Howard County with the opportunity to add more detail and enhance the local mitigation measures that were already in place, as well as to develop new actions to further strengthen Howard County's resiliency to natural hazards. In updating this Plan there were twenty-one (21) ongoing mitigation projects identified to be continued, and nineteen (19) new mitigation actions were added. The chart listing these actions can be found in the 2018 Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan starting on page 145. On page 151 of the Plan there is a list of deleted, combined or removed items from the previous Hazard Mitigation Plan. This table also details why each change was made. I have listed the nineteen (19) new mitigation actions at the conclusion of this written testimony.

As part of the Plan development process we established a Steering Committee, conducted a public survey, held two public meetings, held a public comment period, and had the Plan approved by the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Both MEMA and FEMA reported that the Plan was a strong Plan that met all requirements. Both agencies have formally approved the Plan pending the Council's adoption of the Plan.

The County Executive through his Office of Emergency Management respectfully requests that the Howard County Council adopt the 2018 Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan.

^a 42 U.S.C § 5165 et seq.

Mitigation Actions that have been added to the 2018 Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan:

- Increase public awareness on wildfires by providing outreach and education on urban/wildland interface and increasing buffers and defensible spaces to reduce vulnerability
- Work with County departments and strategic partners to better serve at-risk populations (elderly persons, homeless populations, persons with physical or mental disabilities) through effective public outreach on various hazards and monitor for gaps in providing emergency services to those populations.
- Continue to conduct training exercises for hazard events at least twice a year.
- Maintain requirements to continue recognition as a Storm Ready Community (by the National Weather Service StormReady® Program).
- Continue to conduct seminars in schools on various hazards that could threaten the County and provide informational packets on the county's natural and man-made hazards.
- Continue to utilize FEMA's Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) for sudden onset hazards such as tornados, thunderstorms, or flash floods.
- Coordinate with County PIO and related stakeholders to develop a "pre-approved" set of releases to be disseminated to the public in a timely manner in the event of an emergency.
- Maintain NOAA Weather Alert radios located in designated critical facilities across the County.
- Encourage local businesses and local industry owners to develop a business continuity plan and provide educational materials.
- When updating zoning ordinance, consider provisions for identification of all hazard areas.
- Continue to update, maintain, and implement existing emergency plans, including but not limited to, recovery, response, and/or emergency operations plans
- When updating the County's area plans and comprehensive plan, include hazard mitigation considerations to reduce risk to natural hazards throughout the County.
- Continue regular maintenance program for the County's emergency generators that includes a schedule to change filters, etc.
- Ensure that applicable codes and ordinances, such as building codes, floodplain ordinances, wetland protection, and erosion and sediment control standards are consistently enforced.

- Utilize tracking reports during the annual review process to identify potential barriers or hindrances to implementation of hazard mitigation activities and projects.
- Consider natural resource preservation and land use planning initiatives that ensure natural resource areas that provide hazard mitigation benefits, remain open spaces, to retain the natural benefits they provide.
- Continue to educate homeowners on the potential risk of earthquakes and on safety techniques to follow during and after an earthquake.
- Collect information and develop a queryable database of specific hazard events that caused any damages to County infrastructure and critical facilities.
- Maintain the tree and brush trimming program to protect access to critical facilities and to prevent emergency services from being disrupted due to falling trees or branches, before and/or after a hazard event.