

Testimony to House Government Operations – April 17, 2024

Nicolas Storellicastro, Barre City Manager

- Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee and for the assistance that was included in the Budget Adjustment Act for our community.
- Our communities, especially Barre City and Montpelier, have endured significant hardships due to last July's flooding.
- The aftermath was a struggle for survival, and many are still living every day with the impacts of the flood.
 - I visited a 70 year plus old couple on River Street with Senator Welch on Monday. This family has applied for buyout, has no energy to rebuild at their age in a flood-prone area, and has very few prospects – even with a buyout – of finding an affordable home in Vermont. They have been looking at mobile homes in Florida, but want to be here in Vermont, where their kids and grandkids live.
 - Another resident is weighing a similar challenge – he bought a home in Barre because that's the only place he could afford a home. He was flooded in July and though he prefers to be bought out, he fears he will not find another place to live in Central Vermont. Now, he is hoping for an elevation so he can stay in the home he bought, and stay in Barre.
- The long-term recovery has been as challenging as the immediate after-effects of the flood.
- The pathway to secure necessary funds for mitigation and recovery has been fraught with obstacles, highlighting a critical need for a more streamlined and reliable funding mechanism.
- The Community Resilience and Disaster Mitigation Fund promises to be a lifeline that is missing now. By directly supporting municipal disaster mitigation projects, including crucial home elevation projects, this fund will provide a much-needed lifeline. It will allow communities like ours to prepare more comprehensively for disasters, rather than being left in a perpetual state of recovery.

- The Fund's focus on not only disaster mitigation but also enhancing emergency medical services is commendable. This dual approach ensures that our communities are not only better protected against future disasters, but are also better equipped to respond when they occur.
- As we discuss this today, and as you deliberate this legislation, I urge all members to consider the pressing and immediate needs of our Twin Cities – Barre and Montpelier.
- In conclusion, I fully support the establishment of the Community Resilience and Disaster Mitigation Fund and advocate for its swift implementation.
- Let's ensure that our infrastructure and emergency services are robust enough to withstand whatever challenges come our way.
- This is not just an investment in physical structures, but in the very lives and safety of all Vermonters.
 - Vermonters like the single mom on River Street who has also applied for buyout. She nearly lost all of her and her daughter's personal belongings, including art that her daughter made in school, and blankets and toys she hoped to pass on to her future grandchildren. They could not find housing together, so mom and daughter spent the last year apart.
- Thank you for considering this essential initiative. I look forward to seeing the positive impact it will have on our communities.
- Before closing, I'd like to strongly endorse the provisions of S.310 that add disaster benefits for survivors of public works personnel.
- Our public works employees are heroes. They rescued residents, including your former colleague Tess Taylor, on bucket loaders. They put their lives on the line and deserve to be treated as other public safety staff are. Please enact this important change in state law.