

Jeffersonville Hazard Mitigation Plan

Hazard Assessment & Mitigation

The Project in a Nutshell:

The village of Jeffersonville, located within the town of Cambridge, experienced four moderate to severe flood events during an 11-month period in 2011, culminating with Tropical Storm Irene. The fact that 50% of the town's development is in the floodplain, and the local landslide threat compounds to create an enormous flood hazard in Jeffersonville. In order to reduce this threat, and strengthen the community's resilience to these local hazards, the town has begun working on developing a hazard mitigation plan.

Getting Started: What was the Genesis of this Project?

Half of Jeffersonville's infrastructure and private property sits in the floodplain. The town's location, adjacent to both the Lamoille and Brewster rivers, creates an exceptional risk of flooding. For various reasons, the Lamoille River can back up, inhibiting the flow of the Brewster River. In such an instance, the Brewster River turns directly into the town of Jeffersonville, taking with it high levels of sediment. As one of the 2011 floods was a federally declared disaster, Jeffersonville was eligible for emergency management funding from FEMA through the Lamoille County Regional Planning Commission, which is being used for the hazard mitigation plan. Jean Jenkauskas, a member of the Hazard Mitigation Plan Advisory Committee, stressed the importance of building resiliency in the face of worsening storms. Jean remarked, "We need to do more than stop making things worse, we need to see if there's any way we can reduce the threat and build in more resiliency as the weather gets worse". In response to flooding threats, a local Advisory Committee was formed to work on the hazard mitigation plan. This committee is comprised of community members with different interests and perspectives. Jean emphasized that it was important to ensure that the Advisory Committee received a broad input base, from community members with varying perspectives. The Advisory Committee has held four public meetings. A great deal of research has been involved in the planning process. Collaboration between several organizations has also been critical, including the Cambridge Planning Commission, Cambridge Conservation Commission, and the Lamoille County Regional Planning Commission.

How was this Project Accomplished?

Jeffersonville is currently working on developing their hazard mitigation plan. A key component of the plan will be an engineering modeling program that will enable town planners to test different scenarios of development and climate, and to evaluate how these factors could impact flood risk in the village. This modeling tool, which will help the town choose between different actions, will factor in financial information as well. The hazard mitigation planning process has

presented some challenges. Firstly, Jeffersonville's flood maps are very outdated- they were most recently updated in 1983. The village has requested updated flood maps from FEMA, who has scheduled the village for an update ten years from now- Jeffersonville is a low priority on FEMA's list. Another challenge has been to educate the public about the flood hazard. Jean Jenkauskas and Tammy Fenton of the Advisory Committee reported that it was an "uphill battle" to get the information out there, and to ensure the public understood the hazard and the necessity of a hazard mitigation plan. Despite these difficulties, Jean and Tammy agreed that it is important to educate the public on the issues, and it is crucial to get a broad range of perspectives on these issues. The village of Jeffersonville has also been working on several other flood resilience measures, including floodproofing homes and conserving floodplain area. The Advisory Committee is currently working on raising money to purchase key floodplain area (funds were recently secured from the ANR Ecosystem Restoration Fund). This property is centrally located, and has the potential to become a great public resource for the town, as a park or a site for farmers' markets.

Perspectives on Results

While the hazard mitigation plan is still in progress, it will eventually serve as a foundation that will enable the implementation of flood resilience measures that will serve to enhance Jeffersonville's local resilience to flooding and flood damage. Considering the serious threats facing the village, Jean warned, "If we don't do anything...it could be the demise of this village". Jean offered a valuable piece of advice to other towns; "Work on creating a plan, even if you don't think you need one, because it will be the basis for when it turns out you really did". In fact, a law was recently passed that virtually requires all Vermont municipalities to implement a hazard mitigation plan by 2014. This law- Act 16- requires that every Vermont municipality's town plan must have a flood resilience element included. If a town is lacking this element, the town will be less likely to receive state funding for disaster assistance. Creating a hazard mitigation plan can mitigate future flood damages- and improve a town's ability to recover when disaster strikes.