

Resilient Connecticut 2.0 Town of Westbrook Meeting

1 pm, 4-21-22

Westbrook Town Hall

Present: David Murphy (CIRCA), Mary Buchanan (CIRCA), Margot Burns (RiverCOG), John Hall (Westbrook First Selectman), John Riggio (Westbrook Director of Public Works), John Palermo (Westbrook Emergency Management), Peter Gillespie (Westbrook Town Planner), Marilyn Ozols (Westbrook Planning Commission)

Overview: CIRCA met with the Town of Westbrook and RiverCOG to describe the expansion of Resilient Connecticut into the RiverCOG planning region and provide a forum to the local hazard mitigation plan team to comment on the status of a subset of the actions in the Westbrook Hazard Mitigation Plan adopted in 2019. These meeting notes will be provided to the Town and RiverCOG for appropriate filing related to the Hazard Mitigation Plan.

David commenced the meeting by providing an overview of the Resilient CT project and Resilient CT 2.0 future plans. During the discussion, the local planning team reviewed a subset of the Town’s hazard mitigation actions that have potential relevance for the Resilient CT 2.0 project pipeline, and attendees had an open discussion about the Town’s needs related to climate change and natural hazards.

Review of Subset of HMP Actions:

The Town Planning Commission noted that for many of these items, they have been making progress in bits and pieces based on funding availability, rather than all at once.

Action #	Activity Description	Status
43	Shore Protection Systems. Conduct a study of existing shore protection systems along the entire Westbrook coast to analyze overall impacts and develop recommendations for mitigation including identification of opportunities for compensation for the hardening of one part of the shoreline by removing the equivalent extent of flood and erosion control structures from another part of the shoreline.	A townwide study has not been conducted. However, the Town has capacity to address needs as they arise. The town completed a mitigation plan after Hurricane Irene, which impacted West Beach and knocked out part of the sea wall and parking lot, an area that had suffered repeated losses previously. When the wall was reconstructed, they poured concrete and then capped it with concrete. When Superstorm Sandy occurred, the wall held and the parking lot was not impacted.

59	SHORELINE PROTECTION. Employ Living Shoreline solutions for select areas including low wave energy environments such as tidal marsh borders and river mouths.	This is an ongoing goal. The LIS-funded plan*, if awarded, can help advance this.
66	SHORELINE PROTECTION. Evaluate the technical feasibility of constructing dunes and berms.	Half of the dunes were previously lost due to storm damage. Restoring the habitat and the dunes is an ongoing concern. Some work to restore grasses has occurred. The LIS-funded plan, if awarded, can help advance this.
40	West Beach Dune Restoration. Evaluate potential alternatives for the restoration of dunes along West Beach to develop solutions that will renew the coastal beach and dune system, provide storm damage protection for residents, increase flood control for adjacent properties, and restore a Town resource.	Some restoration work has occurred in the past using FEMA funds after Superstorm Sandy, but no recent work has been done due to a lack of funding. This is an ongoing concern. Future grant applications (see LIFF discussion later) may help to address this goal given the emphasis on nature-based solutions.
31	Evaluate publicly owned and managed outfalls and outlets along the shoreline of Westbrook to identify infrastructure that would benefit from the installation of backflow prevention (e.g. tide gates, check valve)	Old Mail Trail has a valve that was installed in 2000, but several other areas still don't have backflow prevention infrastructure. The largest pipe in Westbrook (which outlets the whole center of Westbrook and the area behind the post office), outfalls on Middle Beach and does not have a valve. This pipe was replaced around 1996, at which point it was moved from the east side of the Middle Beach stone jetty to the west side of the jetty. Public Works has to dig this out a few times a year when it becomes blocked with shifting sandbars.
36	Land Acquisition (Near-term): Identify and prioritize areas for the purchase wetlands and other flood prone open space to enhance natural resources while improving coastal resiliency and flood retention.	No land acquisition has happened in the last few years.

39	Encourage Repetitive Loss Property Owners to pursue flood mitigation funding for actions such as elevation or acquisition of structures where appropriate on a voluntary basis	No acquisitions have occurred in the last few years. Elevations are more common as an approach.
44	Grove Beach Flood Mitigation/ Wetland Study. Conduct a comprehensive hydraulics/hydrology study to identify the cause of flooding and to recommend mitigation measures that focus on reducing flooding within the area. The study will focus on improving watershed connectivity by increasing culvert sizes and improving wetland holding capacity and natural function. The study will evaluate the need for wetland restoration including: fragmentation caused by human activity, the effects of surrounding impervious surfaces, and the presence of non-native invasive species.	<p>The study has not been completed, but the Grove Beach area continues to be an area of flooding concern.</p> <p>The Public Works Director noted that he has worked for the town since 1983 and back then, Grove Beach would flood 1 or 2 times each year. Now it floods up to 40 times per year. Old Mail Trail also floods, and sometimes has up to a foot of water on the road. This flooding cannot be solved by drainage measures..</p>
48	Conduct a roadway emergency access and evacuation planning study to develop conceptual plans and prioritization for pursuing engineering, design and construction funding of roadways identified in the 2014 HMP Update. Roadways should include: 1) Willard Ave. Bypass; 2) Boston Post Road (Route 1); 3) Coral Sands—Dolphin, Striper, Tarpon; 4) West Beach—Seaside Ave.; 5) Middle Beach Salt Island Rd., Pepperidge, Stokes, Gerard; 6) Little Stannard Beach Rd.; 7) Stannard Beach—Second Avenue; 8) Old Kelsey Point Rd.; 9) Chapman Beach Rd./Walden Dr.; 10) Hammock Rd.; 11) Doc’s Hill Rd.;12) Old Clinton Rd. (Rte. 145); 13) McVeagh & Toby Hill Rd.; 14) Meeting House Ln.; 15) Pond Meadow Rd.; 16) E. Pond Meadow Rd.; 17) Stevenstown Rd. (Route 145)	<p>The Town has not embarked on a road elevation program. This might make sense while other projects are underway. For example, new water mains were installed in Striper, Dolphin, and Tarpon Roads approximately 8-10 years ago, at which point there was a discussion about raising the roads. In the end they were replaced at the same height, as the driveways and the houses are also low. Private properties are extremely low-lying in these areas, and they flood as frequently as the roads.</p>
55	Salt Island Overlook Habitat Restoration - Develop & Implement Forest Tree Planting Plan for Salt Island Overlook to restore a coastal forest habitat and increase coastal storm resiliency.	<p>The garden club has been working in this area, as part of the Odell Open Space.</p>

PUBLIC SAFETY: Flood Protection. Provide flood protection for at-risk Essential and Lifeline Facilities.

The Public Works garage is not in the flood zone, although one fire station is low-lying and at risk. The generator at the fire station has been upgraded with more capacity. Westbrook's main shelter is the Daisy Ingraham Elementary School, with the high school as the back-up shelter. The schools are not air-conditioned, so they can be used for warming but not for cooling. The town does not have an official cooling center, but if needed they could use areas in the town hall, including the downstairs senior center. The town hall generator can support cooling the building. The town hasn't received many requests for cooling assistance yet, but this may be more of a concern in the future if Eversource has rolling blackouts.

Open Discussion:

- *Clinton, Westbrook, and Old Saybrook have agreed that they need to do a more detailed and comprehensive vulnerability and risk assessment to support a resilience plan for the three communities. While the Old Saybrook Coastal Resilience Plan includes a very detailed risk assessments, it stopped short of identifying specific recommended actions. The three towns are submitting a request for LIFF funding in May 2022; goals for this funding include the creation of a resilience plan for the three towns, the prioritization of projects, and the identification of actions that can be undertaken easily. Nature-based solutions will be emphasized, which is consistent with the grant program goals.
 - o David asked if the three towns will be taking the same approach. Peter said that Clinton and Westbrook have more work to do to get to Old Saybrook's level in terms of preparation. There may be multi-town benefits.
 - o Westbrook's goal for this new assessment is to get to the plan and project stage, rather than stop at the study stage.
 - o If possible, CIRCA would love to stay in touch about this 3-town plan as it progresses.
- There is one railroad underpass that has a drainage issue due to clogging. However, alternate egress is available.
- Dune projects – Westbrook has completed these in the past, but further needs remain (see items 66 and 40).
- Years ago there was a process for mosquito control that involved special equipment (from Madison and elsewhere) used to clean out drainage ditches (tractor/backhoe that would remove and spread vegetation that was stuck), which worked to keep everything flowing. This process stopped in the early 90s, and impeded flow and tidal flushing is believed more of an issue now. This clearing was previously funded by the DEEP. It is possible that this process was halted for environmental reasons; CIRCA will look into this.

- Marilyn said something similar has been used in Fenwick for marsh restoration.
- East Pond Meadow Road has a flooding issue related to the dam on Wright's Pond. In the 1980s a valve was installed in the dam with a key, and when heavy rain was expected the Public Works department would open the valve and drop the water level in the pond to allow for the extra water. Then in about 1995-1996, DEEP instructed the town not to use the valve anymore and flood concerns and risks became more urgent. The dam is owned by DEEP, who does not have the manpower to adjust the valve for storms. This area is included in the Falls River Zone of Shared Risk delineated by CIRCA.
- The planning team does not have much concern relative to TOD in Westbrook, as the lack of sanitary sewers in the town prevents high-density development near the rail station.
- Margot pointed out that resiliency might also be considered through the lens of business resiliency, etc.
- Beavers are a local concern. Over the years the town has done some trapping but concerns remain about the effects of beavers. In particular there is a beaver problem in North End and a flooded swamp near the Essex line, which is encroaching on the Holbrook Well (the well supplies the public water for most of CWC's Westbrook system).

Follow-up:

- Please take a look at the map viewer for the Zones of Shared Risk and offer any corrections/additions. Link here:
<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/9a4f68dd99f44dc58b93fd85bcfe1255/>
- (Note: the Editor tool within the viewer does not always save reliably, so please email mary.buchanan@uconn.edu with any changes you'd like to see reflected in the Westbrook ZSR layer.)
- If possible, let us know whether any other projects or concerns come to mind after the town planning team has reviewed the full HMP.
- David will share a copy of the presentation.
- If possible, please share a copy of the LIFF application once the submission deadline has passed so that CIRCA can stay informed on the regional resilience planning process.