

Hazard Mitigation Planning Meeting - South Hero
April 3, 2025 | 11:00 a.m.
South Hero Town Office and Zoom

Attendance: Kim Julow (Treasurer & former Fire Chief), Sue Arguin (Town Administrator), Naomi King (Town Clerk), Pat Robinson (Fire Chief), Martha Varney (Zoning Administrator), Shaun Coleman (NRPC)

The purpose of this meeting was to review the current survey results and to finish the hazard identification and risk assessment update.

Survey Results

Five people have responded to the community survey so far.

Hazard Identification and Risk Analysis

Shaun reviewed the risk assessment methodology used at the last meeting. Each hazard is scored based on two main criteria:

1. Probability of occurrence
 - Unlikely, Occasional, Likely, Highly Likely
2. Potential impact to people, the built environment, the natural environment and the economy
 - Negligible, Minor, Moderate, Major
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The scoring scale was included in the meeting materials and an excel worksheet was used to score. The group reviewed each of the remaining hazards identified and scored them by consensus.

Hazardous Materials – Area of impact is usually along Route 2 as the main state hwy. Some Marinas are potentially at risk for fuel spills, but spills are minor typically. Keeler Bay and the Village would be most at risk.

Chief Robinson said the probability of an incident is Likely due to the number of fuel trucks going through town along Route 2. Kim said the potential impact is minor as any incident would be a confined accident site and a buffer zone dependent on the type of spill.

- Infrastructure Impact: Minor because it would be isolated at the location of accident.
- Life Safety: Negligible based on history and isolated incidents.
- Economic: Negligible because it would be isolated. You might not be able to get gas. Clean up costs are on the hauler.
- Environmental: Usually negligible. There have been no major spills in the lake. A hazmat trailer is nearby in Grand Isle with booms to contain spills.

Wind

- Probability: Highly likely due to weather patterns from the west and north that track across lake.
- Infrastructure Impact: Minor. Utility poles are the most impacted with power interruptions. Occasional tree falls across road and causes traffic disruptions. There isn't severe property damage.
- Minimal economic disruption as power disruptions are usually brief.
- Low risk to life safety. There are no known injuries or deaths from wind.
- Environment impacts negligible. Trees and branches knocked down at the worst. Creates waves and causes erosion

Hail

- Probability: Unlikely (1). No damaging events known.

- Impact: Low across all categories. Roofs and vehicles could be damaged.
- Notes: Rarely occurs in the area.

Ice

- Probability: Occasional (2). The worst ice event was in January 1998. Every once in a while, the temps drop in spring and all and wet roads freeze. The sand bar maybe closes at least 1 or 2 times a year briefly from waves splashing on causeway causing icing on roads.
- Minor infrastructure impacts generally. The 1998 ice storm an extreme event.
- Low risk to life safety. No one died in 1998.
- Economy – Low impact. Brief power interruptions disrupt transactions. No major employers impacted.
- Natural Environment – Low impact. Branches break off from icing or trees topple.

Earthquake

Shaun noted that VT Geologic Survey did a hazmat assessment for the Middlebury and Montreal scenarios in 2004. Moderate damages were expected on road infrastructure and older buildings. Estimated the Richter scale less than 6 to impact Vermont.

- Probability: Unlikely (1). Town not situated in or near a fault zone.
- Notes: Small tremors from Montreal or Middlebury epicenters are felt in town. Not a concern.
- Minimal impact expected to life safety, economy and natural environment expected.

Wildfire

Kim noted the grass fires usually occur in South Hero when people are burning fields in spring. There are no large tracks of forests in South Hero. The Town receives a lot of burn permits. The limited wildfires that do occur are usually less than 3 acres and occur because people are burning without a permit when the wind is blowing.

- Probability: Unlikely (1) except during dry periods. State issues red flag warnings. The fire warden monitors fire warnings and is responsible for enforcement.
- Impacts to infrastructure, life safety, economy are very limited, and the natural environment recovers quickly.

Cold

The group discussed long sustained periods of cold and the impacts on the elderly. Cold is the same probability as snow. People are having a hard time paying heating costs. Seasonally, there is a cold spell for a day up to a week. Extended periods of cold beyond a few days are becoming less common.

- Probability: Likely. Winter is cold in the north.
- Potential impacts on vulnerable populations such as homeless, low-income residents (fuel bills). There are no known damages to water lines from deep frost. There are no mobile home parks in town.
- Minor economic disruption to orchards if frost damages all the buds and kills the seasonal crop. That could impact tourism and the local economy. The local orchards were not impacted by the 2023 frost declaration. No impact on the town's operational budget.
- Minor damages to the natural environment. Rarely get agricultural impacts (e.g., apple orchard damages). Earlier fruits like cherries could get hit by frost similar to a few years ago but they recovered.

Town Policies, Plans and Ordinances

The group reviewed the Code of Federal Regulations (Part 2) to limit the financial risk of the town when applying for federal grants. VLCT is developing a policy template. The town will have to conduct a financial risk survey by VT Dept. of Public Safety at some point as recipient of the BRIC grant.

Kim and Naomi reviewed the town's purchasing procedures, conflict of interest policy, personnel policy, purchasing and expenditure policy, and investment policy. North Hero has a grants review Board which South Hero is interested in forming. South Hero is interested in creating a grant management policy (use North Hero's as a model).

Martha noted the town has flood plain regulations and will need to update them for the new FEMA flood maps due to be released in 2027.

There's no public works policy or building codes. The town is part of the Grand Isle Mutual Aid Agreement.

Staffing capacity of the town includes zoning administrator, town administrator, town clerk, treasurer and 2 assistant clerks. The highway department has 3 full-time crew members and a small stipend for a Road Commissioner. Selectboard members receive an annual stipend. The town listers are paid. There is 1 full-time town librarian who has 5 part-time assistants. South Hero Rescue is hiring a full-time position that is paid through the Town's payroll. Rescue is mostly volunteer with five crew members. The fire department is all volunteer.

Next Steps

- The committee will meet in May to wrap up Town capabilities and updating the mitigation actions (past and present). Will review roles and responsibilities in relation to hazard mitigation.
- Shaun will send updated materials out to the committee.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 12:30 p.m.