

MONTPELIER ACTION PLAN FOR LOCAL EMERGENCY (MAPLE) GAP ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT AUGUST 14, 2024

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Introduction

On July 10-11, 2023, the State of Vermont experienced extreme flash flooding and river flooding (inundation) that resulted in extensive damage to homes, businesses, and infrastructure. The City of Montpelier (City) was heavily impacted with inundation flooding in its downtown and flash flooding in its more rural neighborhoods. In the aftermath, dedicated residents created the Montpelier Commission for Recovery and Resilience (Commission). While the Commission is not a formal governmental body, the City of Montpelier has recognized the Commission as a formal partner to assist with improving preparedness and recovery activities. One improvement identified by the Commission is to develop a community response plan that builds upon the City's Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP). The goal of the new plan is to reflect the ability of the **whole community** to prepare and respond, clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all response and recovery functions, and empower City officials, partner organizations, residents, and businesses with tools to improve future disaster response efforts. In May 2024, the Commission contracted with AC Disaster Consulting (ACDC) to support the development of this Montpelier Action Plan for Local Emergency (MAPLE).

Purpose

This report provides a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative gap analysis for the Commission and City of Montpelier that identifies recommendations to improve emergency operations planning in MAPLE and within the community's broader emergency management program. These recommendations will first be reviewed by the Commission and City and will not be implemented without written consensus from the City and Commission.

Methodology

This analysis was conducted through a comprehensive document review and data collection process and stakeholder interviews. Required elements from Vermont Emergency Management's (VEM) LEMP requirements and best practices outlined in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Comprehensive Planning Guide 101 (CPG101) are integrated throughout this report.

Document Review

Through documents provided by the Commission and those gathered through open-source research, insights into the City's previous preparedness and response activities were gathered to inform the stakeholder interviews.

1. **City of Montpelier Local Emergency Management Plan (2024):** The LEMP outlines the personnel, protocols, and procedures in place that the City employs during disaster response efforts.
2. **City of Montpelier Hazard Mitigation Plan (2021):** The HMP provides insights on the potential hazards that the City of Montpelier is vulnerable to and methods for reducing vulnerability.

3. **July 10, 2023 Flood After-Action Report:** This report offers valuable insights into the outcomes, challenges, and lessons learned from the City's July 2023 flood response.
4. **Community Forums:** The Commission hosted a series of community forums immediately after the July 2023 flooding. Meeting notes were reviewed to obtain insight into the background of the Commission's effort and purpose.
5. **Volunteer HUB 2023 Flood Response System:** The Volunteer HUB provided a written document that details their volunteer and donations management system during the July 2023 flooding. Insights related to their system were gathered to identify areas of improvement.

In addition to the documents listed and reviewed above, open-source information such as news articles, other jurisdictional plans, and ad hoc discussions were utilized to inform the stakeholder interviews.

Stakeholder Interviews

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, stakeholder interviews were vital as they allowed for a deeper understanding of the City's current preparedness and response activities and desired outcomes of the MAPLE development process. Through these interviews, insights were gathered on the City's strengths, weaknesses, and potential areas for improvement regarding disaster response.

Stakeholder interviews were designed with a two-pronged approach. ACDC conducted group interviews with City officials and volunteer organizations and the Commission spoke with individual residents, businesses and other City partners. A high-level summary of each interview group is provided below, and the full set of interview questions is provided in Appendix B.

At the time of this report, the Commission is continuing to conduct interviews and collect additional insights from businesses, residents, and vulnerable population organizations. Therefore, the recommendations within this report may evolve.

CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE

Montpelier City Manager and Emergency Management Director Bill Fraser and Communications Coordinator Evelyn Prim were interviewed on June 24. During this interview, details were given on the response and short-term recovery activities that the City Manager's office undertook during the July 2023 flooding. City Manager Bill Fraser was a key individual in the City's Emergency Operations Center (EOC), leading the coordination of response, executing his role as the Public Information Officer (PIO), and organizing resources for the City, residents, and businesses. Communications Coordinator Evelyn Prim led the City's Communication Crisis Response Team (CCRT) whose role was to ensure accurate and timely information was provided within the EOC structure and to the public. Additional insights were gathered on how MAPLE can best serve them for future disasters.

FIRST RESPONDERS

Montpelier's Police Chief Eric Nordenson, Incoming Fire Chief Derek Libby, Interim Fire Chief/ Deputy Fire Chief James Quinn, and Assistant City Manager Kelly Murphy were interviewed on June 26. Insights into the initial response from the July 2023 flooding were gathered, as well as clarifications on roles and responsibilities. Chief Nordenson detailed how the EOC and dispatch within the police

station were moved due to inundation flooding at the building. Interim Chief Quinn spoke of a similar situation with the fire station, where personnel, trucks, and small equipment had to be moved out of the building to higher ground. Deputy City Manager Kelly Murphy provided additional details on the City Manager's Office role in the flood response, as well as insights into the Volunteer HUB. Particular attention by all interviewees on needed preparedness activities (i.e., plans, training, exercise) for future disasters was noted.

VOLUNTEER HUB

Montpelier's Parks Director and Tree Warden Alec Ellsworth, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) AmeriCorps Member Marek Zajac, Commission member Peter Walke, and Montpelier Alive Executive Director Katie Trautz were interviewed on July 15. These individuals spearheaded the Volunteer HUB effort that was essential for response and recovery efforts from the July 2023 flooding. The Volunteer HUB was created in the immediate aftermath of the flooding to manage the numerous donations and volunteers received. Information related to how the City and its non-profit partners worked together to manage donations and volunteers, assist residents and businesses with post-flood cleanup and resource assistance, and conducted financial campaigns. A major takeaway was the need to establish a formal, City-sponsored volunteer and donations management protocol. While the Volunteer HUB was an immediate need that was filled as a result of the flooding, it would have failed without the support of paid City staff and a 30-member Montpelier Youth Conservation Corp (MYCC) team.

VULNERABLE POPULATION ORGANIZATIONS

The Commission, with ACDC in attendance, conducted an interview with staff from the Washington County Mental Health Association and Elevate Youth Services on July 10. These organizations provided a comprehensive background of their services and how they have assisted communities respond to and recover from recent disasters. A major takeaway from this interview was that these community organizations are not typically activated by impacted communities, but rather they take the initiative to show up and assist where needed.

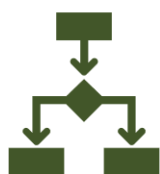
An additional meeting with vulnerable population organizations was facilitated by Commission members on August 2. Similar to the July 10 interview, participants noted the lack of communications from the City, specifically on who and where assistance was needed. Participants also stated they received more consistent communication from the City of Barre.

MONTPELIER BUSINESSES

Commission members and ACDC attended a meeting with Montpelier businesses, hosted by Montpelier Alive, on July 31. Attending businesses provided valuable insights about their experiences with the July 2023 flooding, as well as preparedness and recovery efforts for future disaster. Several businesses pointed out their frustrations with their current landlords not willing to make substantial improvements to reduce flood risk in their commercial spaces. Additionally, businesses stated they would like toolkits to assist them with preparedness, response, and recovery actions, such as a checklist.

Gap Analysis

The gaps identified in this section highlight specific areas of improvement that should be addressed in the MAPLE as well as the emergency management program to improve the community’s response and recovery to future disasters. These gaps were identified through the document review process and stakeholder interviews and are organized into five main categories: **Operational Framework**, **Knowledge Transfer**, **Continuity Planning**, **Training and Exercise**, and **Community Education and Mobilization**. These gaps are presented with no priority to their order.



Operational Framework



Knowledge Transfer



Continuity Planning



Training and Exercise



Community Education and Mobilization

Operational Framework

During the stakeholder interviews, it was evident that a detailed operational framework is needed in MAPLE. For the purposes of this report, an operational framework is a written snapshot of a jurisdiction’s planned emergency response as it relates to what should happen, when, and at whose direction. This operational framework can be articulated through clearly defined roles and responsibilities of all City staff and its partners, as well as detailing protocols for each step in the response and recovery process. In addition, it was unclear whether the City and its partners align their operational framework with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) as it relates to the identification of dedicated departments and/or organizations to support critical community functions (aka Emergency Support Functions such as Natural Resources, Transportation, Volunteer and Donations Management) through response and recovery.

Knowledge Transfer

For the City of Montpelier to effectively and efficiently respond to and recover from future disasters, knowledge transfer is critical to maintain the City’s ability to ensure the safety of its residents. In this report, knowledge transfer refers to identification and transfer of critical skills to new City staff and/or partners. As is often the case with the municipal government, experienced staff members leave and are replaced with new staff members that do not have the institutional knowledge and training necessary to fill the role. For example, City Manager Bill Fraser noted in his interview that when the next disaster comes around, some key individuals who staffed the Volunteer HUB may not be around or available to run it again. This knowledge transfer gap can also be apparent within the City’s partner organizations. These realities underscore the importance of a plan that is widely understood by its respective departments and organizations with implementation responsibilities as well as the value of conducting regular training and exercises with those personnel. Additionally, knowledge transfer

is also applicable to the community, as new residents and businesses need to understand the hazard risks they may experience.

Continuity Planning

Continuity planning refers to the ability of the City and its partners to continue to deliver essential services whether an emergency exists or not and regardless of the personnel performing these services. During the stakeholder interviews, it was noted several times that several key personnel were not available to respond, either due to vacations or because they were individually impacted by the flooding. While the City and its departments have a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), it was stated by several City personnel that the COOP plan needs to be improved. An additional insight gathered through the stakeholder interviews pointed out that during the initial response the EOC did not utilize shift changes. This led to personnel working in the EOC for over 24 hours straight, resulting in staff burnout. Additionally, City leadership felt that public pressure required them to be in the EOC and show their face in the City, regardless of them needing rest.

Once City personnel were able to access Montpelier once the flood waters receded, shift changes were gradually integrated while the EOC was activated. However, it is critical to note that due to the lack of available City personnel and flood impacts, shift changes may have been too difficult to implement during the initial response.

During the initial flood response, several City staff explained the difficulty of moving the EOC from the Montpelier Police Department to the Berling Water Plant. To add to this difficulty, the City of Barre had moved their EOC due to flood risk to the Police Department. When flood waters began to rapidly rise, the Montpelier EOC, Barre EOC, and Montpelier Dispatch had to evacuate to the Berlin Water Plant. Several difficulties were mentioned, as the Berlin Water Plant had limited internet access and cell service, as well as limited electrical outlets. Police Chief Nordenson mentioned they had to utilize police cruiser laptops to perform essential duties, as well as to charge equipment. This can lead to a reduction in police capabilities and EOC operations. However, Police Chief Nordenson proudly stated that no 911 calls were missed during this transfer of facilities.

Training and Exercise

Training and exercise are critical components of a well-rounded emergency management program. As it related to the City of Montpelier, discussions with City personnel highlighted the need for cohesive and collaborative training and exercise with all City departments as well as with their partner organizations. While Montpelier Police and Fire Department members undertake regular training as it applies to their main duties, an identified gap was the lack of training and exercise with other City personnel (i.e., City Manager's Office) evaluating responses to events of greater complexity and severity. This gap also applies to the coordination between the City and its partner organizations.

Subsequently, it was noted that newer City personnel lacked the necessary training to perform disaster-related activities. For example, nuances in public information regarding FEMA disaster relief were not understood to the extent they would have been if proper training had been attended before the event. In another case, it was acknowledged that documentation strategies to ensure reimbursement for eligible expenses later were not understood early on. These practices are

included in training provided by the State or FEMA. Attending these training courses will equip City personnel with the knowledge to avoid delays in reimbursement in future.

An additional gap that was identified includes integrating emergency management training when onboarding new City personnel. By integrating this type of training into onboarding, the City can improve their knowledge transfer and continuity planning.

Community Education and Mobilization

It is evident that the Montpelier Community is passionate about disaster response and recovery. Immediately following the July 2023 flood, the Montpelier Commission for Recovery and Resilience was established by dedicated residents and professionals. The Commission held a series of well-attended community forums to gather information and insights from residents and businesses on how the City can recover quickly from this disaster and become more resilient before the next. Residents expressed their frustrations with City communications and monetary resources that were available to repair damages.

Due to the impacts the flood had on Montpelier businesses and residents, the creation of the Commission highlighted the need for community education and mobilization guidelines. The stakeholder interviewees often noted a lack of understanding of what permits were needed to re-open businesses or what resources were available. Residents displayed similar frustrations on what immediate actions to take and what resources were available.

As it relates to the Volunteer HUB, stakeholders identified the need for a written volunteer and donations management plan to guide the HUB and its volunteers on safe and effective activities in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.

Actionable Recommendations

Following document review and stakeholder interviews, several gaps and associated recommendations were identified for consideration by the City and Commission. Each of the five identified categories of gaps has a series of recommendations and best practices to improve the City's emergency management program. **It is important to note that these are recommendations and therefore are not implementable unless authorized by the City and Commission.**

Operational Framework

The following recommendations have been made specifically related to operational framework.

Recommendation 1

Establish critical functions within the City's operational framework and assign responsible personnel and/or partners to each. It is highly recommended within MAPLE that the City and its partners identify leads for critical emergency management functions. Each identified role within the MAPLE should be grouped by critical municipal function, as established by [NIMS](#), to include:

- **Administration, Communications, and External Affairs:** City manager’s office, finance, and other essential City services.
- **Transportation, Public Works, and Energy:** public works, water and wastewater, communications (i.e., internet, cell), power, heating/cooling, and dams.
- **Economy:** businesses, chamber of commerce, and non-profit organizations.
- **Natural and Cultural Resources:** parks and trees, historical society, and event organizations.
- **Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Housing, and Human Services:** Volunteer HUB and vulnerable population organizations.
- **Public Safety and Security, Firefighting, and Search and Rescue:** police, fire, search and rescue.

Each critical function listed above should be accompanied by specifically defined scopes.

Recommendation 2

Develop clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all identified responsible partners of MAPLE. Establishing clearly defined roles and responsibilities for City personnel, Montpelier Alive, Long Term Recovery Group (LTRG), additional partners, residents, and businesses will allow for a seamless transition from a ‘blue-sky’ status to disaster response and recovery. In addition, this context integration into the MAPLE will align coordination efforts between City personnel, the commission, and its partners.

Recommendation 3

Hire a City Emergency Management Director. The Emergency Management Director (EMD) is an appointed individual who is directly responsible for the organization, administration, and coordination of a municipality’s emergency management program. As it currently stands, City Manager carries the responsibilities of the EMD, and in the past, it has been assigned to the Fire Chief. In a typical response, the City Manager and Fire Chief are beholden to executing their individual duties and may not have the bandwidth to perform EMD duties. It is recommended that the City hires an EMD so they can fully dedicate their time to building and improving the emergency management program. This can include maintaining emergency plans and protocols, managing the EOC, facilitating and coordinating with stakeholders, and organizing training and exercises. Alternatively, the City may appoint an Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC) to fill this role to maintain the EMD in a position of authority, such as the City Manager.

Recommendation 4

Develop an EOC-specific operational framework. To aid the City and its partners during response efforts, an EOC-specific operational framework should be developed within MAPLE that clearly articulates who and how the EOC is activated, define the coordination between EOC and onsite incident command, and identify incident-specific procedures (e.g., planned events versus unplanned disasters).

Recommendation 5

Update City staff job descriptions to include response and recovery specific roles and responsibilities. Following the completion of MAPLE, the City should integrate the defined roles and responsibilities of each City staff person into their official job descriptions to set clear expectations of staff during disasters. For example, it is not the formal responsibility of Parks & Trees to activate and run the Volunteer HUB. As this responsibility is most appropriate in this City department, the official job descriptions of each Parks & Trees staff person should include these details to formalize the role of the City in volunteer and donations management.

Recommendation 6

Strengthen the City's alert system and communications plan. Since August 2023, the Commission has hosted and facilitated a number of community forums to seek input from residents and businesses while also prioritizing a list of immediate action items to assist the City with future disaster response. Several key points related to information, communications, and available resources were brought up by residents as an improvement item for the City. Congruently, interviewees explained their frustrations with public communications, specifically noting that the frequency of VT-Alert messages caused residents to ignore messages, and some interviewees mentioned that there was misinformation on unofficial channels. Discussion with vulnerable population organizations highlighted additional frustrations with the lack of communications from the City. Currently, the City has an active Crisis Communication Response Team (CCRT) and communications plan built into the LEMP.

To continue to strengthen the City's disaster communication strategy, MAPLE should detail improvements related to the frequency, format and language (to include inclusive language), and coordination with partners for all official City communications. An emphasis on residents and businesses signing up for VT-Alert to receive real-time emergency communications will be integrated. This recommendation also goes hand in hand with the Volunteer HUB to ensure that information on available resources and volunteer opportunities are distributed in a robust and inclusive manner.

Knowledge Transfer

The following recommendations have been made specifically related to knowledge transfer.

Recommendation 1

Identify primary and secondary individuals and organizations to staff key functions of emergency response. Due to the nuances of the July 2023 flooding, several staff that serve in key functions of the City's emergency response were unable to access the EOC and their offices. Additionally, it was noted by several stakeholders that several staff were out of town and were unable to assist in a remote capacity. Within the MAPLE, it is recommended to identify primary and secondary individuals and/or organizations for each role to ensure that response efforts are unhindered. In addition, the Volunteer HUB group interview noted that without the availability of the

MYCC crew and AmeriCorps member, the volunteer and donations management process would have looked a lot different. When the primary and secondary, and if necessary, tertiary, individuals and/or organizations are identified, it is recommended that the City ensure these roles are filled with trained and experienced individuals.

Recommendation 2

Ensure all City personnel and partner organizations have a copy and working knowledge of MAPLE. During the stakeholder interviews, it was evident that not all City staff and its partners possessed the 2024 LEMP. When the MAPLE is completed, the City should disseminate copies to all users of the plan to align response expectations, create an understanding of roles and responsibilities among all partners, and are familiar with how to use the plan. Additionally, users of the plan will be invited to participate in a training course on MAPLE, where the associated training materials will be provided to stakeholders to utilize.

Continuity Planning

The following recommendations have been made specifically related to continuity planning.

Recommendation 1

All key EOC positions should have multiple levels of trained personnel. In alignment with Recommendation 1 under Knowledge Transfer, the City should identify primary and secondary individuals to staff all key EOC positions. In addition, the City should ensure these identified individuals are trained and able to perform the role. Within MAPLE, it is recommended that a minimum set of trainings for each EOC position be identified to ensure continuity of operations.

Recommendation 2

Identify alternate and safe locations for critical facilities, such as the EOC and the Volunteer HUB. During the initial onslaught of the July 2023 flooding, the City's primary EOC location and dispatch center in the Montpelier Police Department was compromised. Additionally, the City of Barre had established their EOC in the same location due to their primary EOC being flooded out. It is highly recommended in the MAPLE to identify an alternate and safe location for the EOC. While the Berlin Water Plant became the ad-hoc EOC location, it lacked the necessary assets (i.e., internet, electrical outlets) to efficiently respond to the disaster. Subsequently, the Volunteer HUB interview highlighted that the original staging area for volunteers and donations experienced hazards such as flood water debris and dust from muddied City streets. Within MAPLE, it is recommended to detail safe and alternate locations for these critical functions.

Recommendation 3

Implement a standardized shift-change to reduce staff burnout. EOC staff that were interviewed noted long, late hours in the EOC without shift-changes. These long hours led to extreme tiredness, which can lead to mistakes during critical response time. While it was also noted that several EOC

staff were unable to access downtown Montpelier, it is recommended to establish a shift-change policy within MAPLE to ensure EOC staff do not experience burnout. One potential solution to this is to train and educate willing community members to fill in roles within the EOC.

Recommendation 4

Update the City's COOP. It was mentioned several times during the stakeholder interview process that the City, and some of its departments, possess a COOP. While the COOP was not received as a part of this report, it is recommended that the City integrate context from the MAPLE into the COOP. This includes primary and secondary staff for each critical function and roles and responsibilities.

Training and Exercise

The following recommendations have been made specifically related to training and exercise.

Recommendation 1

Develop a training and exercise plan to evaluate the MAPLE and other associated disaster-related policies and procedures. Within the MAPLE, a training and exercise plan should be incorporated to evaluate the MAPLE, along with any associated disaster-related policies and procedures, on a regular basis (e.g., annually) to ensure that all users of the plan are familiar with the City's operational framework. In addition, this training and exercise plan will be utilized to affirm and establish relationships between the City and its partners. It is not unusual for municipalities and its partner organizations to have frequent staff turnover. A training and exercise program will establish a baseline knowledge for all users of the plan. Additionally, this training and exercise program can be utilized to train dedicated community members to fill roles within the EOC.

Recommendation 2

Establish a regularly scheduled forum or meeting between the City and its partners. In addition to the recommendation stated above, the City should conduct regularly scheduled (i.e., quarterly, bi-annually, etc.) response and/or recovery forum with its partners to ensure all users of the plan have a baseline understanding of the plan and with each other. Regular communication with key partners is critical to maintain and establish the relationships necessary for a successful response and recovery process. To emphasize this recommendation, staff turnover within the municipality and its partner organizations can create confusion and a lack of understanding during times of disaster. This forum can be an opportunity to meet new staff, bring them up to speed on the City's emergency response protocol, and to establish relationships for easier coordination during disaster response. Context related to this recommendation should be incorporated into the Plan Maintenance section of MAPLE.

Recommendation 3

Establish minimum training standards for all City personnel, and as a part of new employee onboarding, to educate them on the MAPLE and familiarize them with their disaster-related

roles and responsibilities. To further improve preparedness efforts, the City should incorporate minimum training standards for all City personnel. Depending on the role each staff person is assigned during disasters, familiarization with the MAPLE and taking self-led FEMA Incident Command System (ICS) courses will ensure that all staff have a basic understanding of the City's operational framework. In addition, the City can reach out to VEM to conduct City-specific training. Within MAPLE, a recommended set of training courses for each staff person should be integrated.

Recommendation 4

Ensure the community is well-versed in the FEMA reimbursement and monetary assistance programs. During the interview process, City personnel often pointed out the confusing and often nuanced FEMA requirements for reimbursement. While basic documentation strategies are recommended at the beginning of a response effort, this may not meet all the requirements for FEMA Public Assistance (PA) reimbursements. Within the MAPLE, it is recommended to insert a high-level overview of required documentation strategies the City should employ, as well as links to further information available through FEMA and VEM. Subsequently, the City may wish to request FEMA reimbursement training from VEM. Additionally, recommended strategies and links to further information should be included in MAPLE to assist partners, residents, and businesses with FEMA reimbursement and/or assistance programs.

Community Education and Mobilization

The following recommendations have been made specifically related to community education and mobilization.

Recommendation 1

Build emergency management capacity in the City to sustain the work of the Montpelier Commission for Recovery and Resilience. Throughout the document review process and stakeholder interviews, it was unequivocally clear that the Commission is an essential community-led organization that has been incredibly powerful in advocating for Montpelier residents throughout flood recovery. Immediately following the July 2023 flooding, the Commission was created after a series of community forums where residents identified the need to develop a coordinating body to implement immediate actions to reduce future flood impacts. Since the Commission was created, additional community forums were facilitated to gather public insights, give updates on identified projects, and launched a successful fundraising campaign to support the implementation of projects. The City does not currently possess the capability or capacity to perform these essential services, so the Commission was able to step into this critical role.

While there is a general understanding amongst the Commission that it will transition out of active work in the future, it is highly recommended that the institutional capacity and community organization that has been enhanced by the Commission post-disaster transitions to an established advisory body to the City. The function of the Commission is valuable to ensure the City is prepared for future disasters and maintains a strong connection between the City and all facets of the community. It is recommended the Commission work with the City to establish a sustaining body that will advise the City on necessary disaster preparedness and mitigation actions, support

communication and advocacy during disaster recovery, and build a culture of preparedness regarding risks and hazards of disaster in the future.

Recommendation 3

Develop operational checklists to assist the City, its partners, residents, and businesses with response and recovery. While the City has a pre-existing LEMP, interviewees often noted that the document is not useful during response operations. Several City staff noted that a checklist of action items for response and initial recovery work is desired to assist them with their operations. In addition, the community forums highlighted the desire for a preparedness and response checklist for residents and businesses to help them immediately respond and recover on their own before seeking assistance from the City or its community organizations. Within MAPLE, it is recommended to develop three different operational checklists; one for the City and its partners, one for residents, and one for businesses.

After the MAPLE is completed, the community should enhance preparedness efforts by working together with partners to educate stakeholders on understanding their risk and properly preparing for future disasters. This can be in the form of developing a comprehensive preparedness plan that identifies action items to increase the community's ability to respond and quickly recover from disaster. This preparedness plan could also be developed in tandem with a business continuity plan to outline how Montpelier businesses can continue to operate after disaster.

Recommendation 4

Institutionalize the Volunteer HUB as an official City entity. The Volunteer HUB is a reliable, essential asset for the community to be able to respond and recover from disasters. During the stakeholder interview, interviewees stressed that the success of the HUB was due to the ability of full-time paid City staff to run the operations, noting that without this City support the HUB would have likely failed. To institutionalize this as an official City function, expectations for the Parks & Trees department need to be formalized in personnel job descriptions. It is recommended that the Volunteer HUB be initially formalized as an official City function in MAPLE. In addition, other community organizations and personnel should be identified to assist with HUB operations.

Recommendation 5

Develop a volunteer and donations management plan. A major takeaway during the Volunteer HUB stakeholder interview was the desire for a written volunteer and donations management plan. Interviewees stressed that the July 2023 flood response was largely responsible because of an AmeriCorps member, 30-member MYCC crew, a private resident, and the willingness of paid City staff. In addition, the Volunteer HUB was supported by Montpelier Alive, a local non-profit organization that assisted businesses recover and reopen. The operational framework of the HUB was quickly formulated as the community responded to the flooding. Within MAPLE, it is recommended to develop a high-level volunteer and donations management plan that identifies key individuals, activation criteria, and volunteer and donations tracking mechanisms. This management

plan should allow for flexibility and creativity to apply to any type or scale of disaster. Context related to volunteer recruitment and training should be integrated.

Recommendation 6

Create neighborhood organizations to assist individuals and families prepare for, respond to, and recover from disaster. To enhance the community’s ability to quickly respond and recover from disaster, it is in the best interest of residents to create neighborhood-level organizations. These organizations would be comprised of homeowners, renters, representatives from neighborhood businesses, churches, schools, and any other relevant neighborhood members. These organizations can fill essential roles, such as fundraising to create “go-bags” in the event of evacuation, or to assist the City with distributing communications and information.


Summary and Next Steps





Summary

The City of Montpelier possesses the essential emergency management framework needed to effectively and efficiently respond to disasters. However, through the document review process and stakeholder interviews, several gaps and associated recommendations were identified to assist the City with its emergency management program. Insights gathered from the Commission for Recovery and Resilience, residents, and businesses highlight additional improvements they would like to see from the City. The MAPLE will serve as a comprehensive document that articulates the operational framework of the City and its partners, outlines critical steps for community action, and functions as a continuous improvement mechanism to enhance preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. **Without buy-in from the City, its partners, and the community at-large, MAPLE will not be successful or implementable.**

The table below summarizes the gaps and recommendations contained within this report.

Table 1: Summary of Gaps and Recommendations

<p>Operational Framework</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish critical functions within the City’s operational framework and assign responsible personnel and/or partners to each. • Develop clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all identified responsible partners of MAPLE. • Hire a City Emergency Management Director. • Develop an EOC-specific operational framework. • Update City staff job descriptions to include response and recovery specific roles and responsibilities. • Strengthen the City’s alert system and communications plan.
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<p>Knowledge Transfer</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify primary and secondary individuals and organizations to staff key functions of emergency response. • Ensure all City personnel and partner organizations have a copy and working knowledge of MAPLE.
<p>Continuity Planning</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All key EOC positions should have multiple levels of trained personnel. • Identify alternate and safe locations for critical facilities, such as the EOC and the Volunteer HUB. • Implement a standardized shift-change to reduce staff burnout. • Update the City’s COOP.
<p>Training and Exercise</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a training and exercise plan to evaluate the MAPLE and other associated disaster-related policies and procedures. • Establish a regularly scheduled forum or meeting between the City and its partners. • Establish minimum training standards for all City personnel, and as a part of new employee onboarding, to educate them on the MAPLE and familiarize them with their disaster-related roles and responsibilities • Ensure the community is well-versed in the FEMA reimbursement and monetary assistance programs.
<p>Community Education and Mobilization</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build emergency management capacity in the City to sustain the work of the Montpelier Commission for Recovery and Resilience. • Develop operational checklists to assist the City, its partners, residents, and businesses with response and recovery. • Institutionalize the Volunteer HUB as an official City entity. • Develop a volunteer and donations management plan. • Create neighborhood organizations to assist individuals and families prepare for, respond to, and recover from disaster.

Next Steps

This Gap Analysis and Recommendations Report was provided to the Commission for initial review on July 19, 2024. The Commission reviewed this Report over a series of working meetings, feedback was integrated into the final report. Following the final validation of the recommendations contained within this report, the MAPLE Annotated Outline will be updated and finalized. The City will then be provided copies of this report and annotated outline for review and additional feedback. As the City reviews these documents, the MAPLE will be drafted for review by the Commission and City before public review and comment.

Appendices

Appendix A: Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
ACDC	AC Disaster Consulting
CCRT	Communication Crisis Response Team
Commission	Montpelier Commission for Recovery and Resilience
COOP	Continuity of Operations Plan
CPG101	Comprehensive Planning Guide 101
EMC	Emergency Management Coordinator
EMD	Emergency Management Director
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FEMA PA	Federal Emergency Management Agency Public Assistance
HMP	Hazard Mitigation Plan
ICS	Incident Command System
LEMP	Local Emergency Management Plan
MAPLE	Montpelier Action Plan for Local Emergency
MYCC	Montpelier Youth Conservation Corps
NIMS	National Incident Management System
VEM	Vermont Emergency Management
VHCB	Vermont Housing and Conservation Board

Appendix B: Stakeholder Interview Questions

CITY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Roles & Responsibilities:
 - Can you give a high-level overview of your current day job?
 - During the response to the July 2023 flooding, what tasks did you accomplish? What were your main responsibilities?
 - Was there a need for additional staff/volunteers to assist with response operations?
- Communications:
 - How did you receive information about the flood response?
 - During the July 2023 flood response, how were you activated or notified to staff the Emergency Operations Center?
 - Were there any gaps in communication that you experienced? (e.g., lack of cell coverage)
 - How did you collect and disseminate information within the EOC? Were all EOC staff able to access this information?
 - How was information shared with the public, particularly vulnerable populations (i.e., access and functional needs, elderly, homeless)?
- Coordination:
 - Were there other stakeholders/partners not involved in the initial response that should have been?
 - Where was more coordination/communication needed with stakeholders/partners?
- Training/Preparedness:
 - Before the July 2023 flood, did you receive any training on emergency response? (i.e., Incident Command)
 - Do you have a copy of the City's current LEMP? If yes, did you utilize this during the July 2023 flood?
- General:
 - What would you like to see in the new plan? How would you use it?
 - What went well during response? What would you change next time?
 - Were there any needs not met during the response?
 - Did you interact with residents during the response? If yes, how?
 - What resources were residents and/or businesses seeking in the immediate aftermath of the flood?
 - Are there any other documents or information that may be useful for us to review and/or incorporate into the new plan?

RESIDENTIAL, BUSINESS, AND PARTNER ORGANIZATION INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Response:
 - How were you impacted by the July 2023 floods?
 - How did you receive information on the need to stay in place or evacuate from your home?
 - Was the City's communication with residents and businesses effective in your opinion? Please explain.
 - Overall, how well do you think the City responded to the flood?

- Did you receive information on resources, financial or otherwise, that may have been available to you?
 - A week or two after the flood waters receded, what resources or information were you given? Additionally, what resources or information did you wish to have that the City or other entities not provide?
- Volunteering (if the individual volunteered or received volunteer assistance)
 - Did you volunteer after the floods? If yes, what did you do?
 - Were you part of an official volunteer organization or did you show up as an individual?
 - How did you receive directions when you volunteered?
 - Did you receive volunteer assistance? If yes, how did you request and receive assistance?
 - Were you given any guidance and/or gear for your personal health and safety when volunteering?