Coastal Hazards Adaptation Team (CHAT) Work Session #68

Tuesday, January 21, 2025

1:00-3:00PM

VIRTUAL MEETING

MINUTES

1. Introductions

CHAT Members

Jay Diener – Hampton Conservation Commission
Bob Ladd – Hampton Beach Village District
Ward Galanis – Hampton Planning Board
Jason Bachand – Hampton Town Planner
Stephen LaBranche – Member at large
Eric Sunderlin – Hampton DPW
Tom Bassett – Resident Representative
Jen Hale – Hampton DPW Director
Rayann Dionne – Seabrook Hampton Estuary Alliance
Kate Bashline – Hampton Resident
Chris Muns – Hampton State Representative
Ben Ritt – Hampton Coastal Resilience Coordinator
Annie Cox – Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership
Sara Gagnon – Coastal Conservation Coordinator
Jen Gilbert – DES Coastal Program Resilience Project Manager
Chris Muns – Hampton State Representative
Gary Bashline – Flood Ready Neighborhoods

CHAT Support Staff

Liz Durfee – Planning Consultant and CHAT Coordinator

Guests
Maddie Dilonno – Rockingham Planning Commission

2. Approve meeting notes from October and November 2024 (5 mins)

Motion: Mr. Diener moved to approve the October 2024 meeting minutes as edited.

Second: Mr. Ward

Vote: All in Favor

Motion: Ms. Hale moved to approve the November 2024 meeting minutes as edited.

Second: Mr. Diener

Vote: All in Favor

3. Relevant Flood Updates (20 mins)

Ms. Hale

- Introduced Ben Ritt, the new Hampton Coastal Resilience Coordinator.

Mr. Bassett

- Shared pictures from November 26, December 11 and December 17, 2024. Aquarion started work in December 2024 to put in the new water main which resulted in messy, muddy flooding which is seen in the December 11 flooding picture.
- Shared pictures of January flooding. Flooding from January 1, 2025, was due to flooding from the marsh and water coming from the storm drains.
- Shared a chart showing six days of continuous flooding between January 10-16, 2025, with predicted and observed high tide data.
    - Flooding typically lasts about four to six hours after recorded high tide. The flooding ebbs as the tide goes out.
- Mr. Bassett spoke to Ms. Keys, the Aquarion representative, about the effect of flooding on the construction work. Ms. Keys stated the flooding impacts the cost and duration of the project.
    - The Aquarion water main project is wrapping up.
- The Kings Highway/Meadow Pond drainage project has started.
- ZBA applications are now available online for a three-month trial period. This allows interested parties the opportunity to review projects that may impact their communities and post comments.
    - The request was made partially in response to the 931 Ocean Blvd project which initially proposed not to build private parking spaces and instead use public parking. This would have reduced available parking for neighborhood residents impacting flood readiness capacity.

Mr. Galanis

- Asked Ms. Hale about the impact of the flooding on the pavement in the area. Ms. Hale responded that there is no pavement in the area currently. But when flooding occurs in flooding area, it is destructive to pavement and results in a shorter lifespan. Reducing the amount of time pavement is underwater is one of the benefits of alleviating flooding through projects like the current Aquarion project. It is also a good idea to consider the timing when placing loam and seed to minimize the chance of it being washed away by flooding.

Ms. Durfee

- Stated that Dr. Jacobs who spoke at the last CHAT meeting is currently doing research on the impacts of sea level rise induced groundwater rise on pavements and pavement structure.

Mr. Diener

- Attended a meeting sponsored by the Hampton Chamber of Commerce discussing dealing with emergency situations. There was a speaker from a small Rhode Island town that was impacted by Hurricane Sandy. Her discussion largely focused on what the Chamber, the town, town residents, and town businesses did to recover from the hurricane. The takeaway was that proactive planning is far more beneficial than reactive responses to major events.
    - The Hampton Chamber is establishing a 501c3 fund that can be used for fundraising and disbursement to help businesses in the community in the event of a large emergency.

Mr. LaBranche

- Asked if there is a plan in case of fire at the beach which could be spread by wind. If the area is flooded, the fire trucks would be damaged and likely couldn't respond. Ms. Durfee stated the Emergency Management Plan, directed by the Emergency Management Director, would likely have this information. Mr. LaBranche stated he would look into it and share the information at the next CHAT meeting.

Ms. Hale

- The Kings Highway project is underway with approximately 300 feet per day being completed. DPW posts a "two-week outlook" rather than a daily schedule because weather, equipment, and personnel can impact the timeline. The ultimate goal for the project is for all the force main work to be done first. Aquarion will provide a two week notice to DPW when they are prepared to move into the Green and Gentian neighborhoods. The projected pump station is expected to be up and operational by July 2025. DPW has contingency plans if there is a delay for the pump station.
- The bicentennial wall project is underway. The wall protects part of High Street and the state roadway. The revetment has been removed, and sheet piles will be installed in about three weeks. The goal is to be completely done with the wall by May for the summer season.

Mr. Bachand

- Provided an update on the zoning article for elevation of non-conforming structures in the special flood hazard area. CHAT and SHEA provided letters of support. The article was heard and moved to the ballot by the planning board. It will be presented at the deliberative session of February 1. No changes can be made at the deliberative session but there will be an opportunity to speak and make comments. Voters will vote on this in March.

Ms. Hale

- There is a warrant article for March to raise and appropriate $300K to create a pot of money to provide implementation funds, matching grant funds, and other ways of moving towards coastal resilience.

4. Voluntary Elevation and Buyout Programs (1 hr)

  a. Hampton Swift Current Program and related updates

    i. Jennifer Hale, Brianna Hagan, and Jason Bachand, Town of Hampton

Ms. Hale

- Hampton has been working on an Acquisition and Home Elevation framework. This work started through grants from DES. FEMA has funding opportunities that allow the Town of Hampton to work on behalf of homeowners for either home acquisition or elevation projects. Property owners don't apply directly with FEMA, instead they work with the Town who investigates state and federal funding opportunities to recoup costs for homeowners.
- The Town has focused more on home elevation rather than acquisition programs currently. Acquisition programs are more complicated than elevation projects. Properties that are acquired are no longer able to be developed and go back to nature, which has multi-level impacts on the town, to include impacting the tax base.
- FEMA Swift Current Grant was recently awarded to the Town of Hampton. This is a reimbursement program for homeowners who meet certain criteria including having current flood insurance (NFIP) and experiencing repetitive or substantial damage. This program provides a faster process for reimbursement.

    - The homeowner covers the entire cost of elevation up front and would be reimbursed by this program.
    - This is a voluntary program.
- The FEMA Swift Current Program requires a detailed application with a variety of data. The Town of Hampton assisted homeowners and submitted six applications through Homeland Security (HSEM) to FEMA by the January 10, 2025 deadline.
- All work on approved applications must be completed within a 36-month period of performance. The Town monitors the work and then closes out the process with FEMA.
- Questions to be addressed include:
    - What happens if one application is approved but the adjacent property application is denied?
    - What happens if laws or regulations interfere with implementation of coastal resilience projects? For example, if NH wetland law states structures can't be moved further into the wetland, but the elevation of the property results in a move into the wetland due to a variety of reasons, is the elevated structure increasing or decreasing impact on the wetland?
    - When homes are elevated, what about the roads? What is the plan for road or infrastructure elevation?
    - Condominium communities require collective decision making.
    - How does home remodeling fit into the FEMA home elevation program? If someone wants to elevate and add a second floor, can they?

Ms. Bashline

- Asked if there is a requirement for the property to be a primary residence. The answer is no.

Mr. Diener

- Expressed appreciation for all the work moving this project forward.
- A few years ago, SHEA and NOAA collaborated on a report on the Impacts of Sea Level Rise in Coastal Communities by 20250. The projected impacts to single family homes in Hampton ranges from 300 to 700 homes. These projected impacts may render some homes no longer livable. The 2050 projections highlight the importance of programs like the Swift Current Program being implemented now.

Mr. Bassett

- Asked if there a social economic profile of the six applicants selected. He stated the up front costs for these projects limit opportunities for lower income residents. Ms. Hale stated she doesn't have financial information about applications. However, applicants must affirm their ability to pay for costs not covered by the grant.
- The application for 566 Winnacunnet Rd is available on the ZBA website, and the project has been approved with caveats. This is an ambitious project.

Ms. Durfee

- Asked if there is a plan for the town to collect socio-demographic information. She stated a survey could be sent out asking if this project would be able to performed without reimbursement. Ms. Hale stated there is interest in ensuring equitable access to these programs. Research on other funding sources needs to be done to allow access for elevation programs for more homeowners. Part of the process is educating residents about timelines and planning for the future. Lessons learned from the current program can help ease the way for future applications.

Ms. Cox

- Asked about the availability of contractors to do the elevation work. Ms. Hale stated this is a concern. FEMA requires multiple quotes to ensure the most cost-effective work. The amount of local contractors in the area is limited.

Ms. Durfee

- Asked about the possibility of holding an info session for future applicants to share lessons learned by DPW and current applicants. Ms. Hale stated that sharing the lessons learned is ideal, but the process takes a while and homeowners are likely not available any time soon.

b. State and Regional Perspective on elevation and buyout programs
    i. Jennifer Gilbert, NHDES Coastal Program, and Maddie DiIonno, Rockingham Planning Commission

Ms. Gilbert

- Shared a presentation about the Hampton Voluntary Elevation Property, Acquisition, and Relocation (VEPAR) program.
    - What is VEPAR?
        - Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) and NHCP worked to develop a framework to identify, prioritize, and support voluntary property acquisition and elevation projects in flood prone areas in Hampton.
        - The project framework was developed by gathering data from a local needs assessment survey as well as incorporating best practices from similar community programs. The framework is available on the Hampton town website.
        - The goal of VEPAR is to improve public safety as flooding increases by providing accessible an transparent government funding to assist with voluntary elevation and acquisition of properties and voluntary relocation of people.
    - What is happening in NH regarding home elevations and property acquisitions?
        - There haven't been many large-scale government funded projects for elevations or acquisitions
        - FEMA Swift Current Grant (discussed above) was awarded in 2024.
        - Londonderry FEMA Severe Repetitive Loss Grant awarded in 2011 – 3 homes elevated
        - Acquisition projects – often follow large scale flood events. FEMA acquisitions in NH include Allenstown (2010-2012), Salem (2010), and Alstead (2005). Acquisitions instead of elevations were pushed in these locations due to high flooding and safety concerns. A cost benefit analysis was accomplished to approve acquisitions. More residents wanted acquisition, but they didn't all show a benefit, so they didn't qualify. The towns took ownership of the acquired properties, and the land remains undeveloped.

Ms. Dilonno

- Shared background on how VEPAR framework for Hampton was developed.
    - How is VEPAR similar/different from other elevation and property acquisition programs in other communities and states?
    - Elevation Programs
        - Hull, MA and Scituate, MA shared details of their programs and lessons learned.
        - In Hull, less than 10 homes have been elevated with FEMA funds. More home elevations have been funded privately. The Hull program has a full-time staff

member and 50% of their time is spent assisting with applications. Issues with up-front funding and finding contractors to do the work have been encountered.

    - In Scituate, approximately 75 homes have been elevated through FEMA funding over the last 20 years. The elevation program is administered through the town's Coastal Management Office. Approximately 10% of the staff's time is dedicated to assisting with applications.
    - Lessons Learned:
        - Have a strong relationship with state agency administering the funding. In NH, that would be NH HSCM
        - Importance of engaging with all town departments
    - King County, WA home elevation project:
        - This is a county level project and also involves an acquisition program
        - Since 2008, 66 home elevations and 215 home acquisitions have occurred
        - Local, state, and federal funding is used, FEMA is a small part of program funding
- Acquisition programs
    - Programs in Austin, TX, Kenosha County, WI and New Jersey Blue Acres, NJ were reviewed to identify different strategies and lessons learned in these communities. In TX, a drainage utility fee helps supplement match requirements and fund acquisitions. The town also helps with homeowner relocation expenses. Buyouts are prioritized by the Watershed Protection Master Plan. In WI, the country contracted with the Regional Planning Commission for staffing to facilitate applications with homeowners.
    - The NJ Blue Acres buyout program is a longstanding state buyout program and is nationally recognized as the gold standard for buyout programs in the US. In 2019 the NJ legislature passed a constitutional amendment to provide sustained funding for Blue Acres funded partially by state corporate business taxes.
        - This program works with local governments to prioritize buyouts of affected neighborhoods instead of individual properties. The program has a diversified staff to administer the program and assist homeowners to include case managers, financial advisors, and legal experts
- The various programs throughout the US illustrate that there isn't a one size fits all solution. Funding, staff capacity, public perception and public engagement all play a role in program implementation and levels of success.
- What are the challenges in Hampton and NH and what is needed to make the program successful?
    - Challenges include: complex application process, capacity needed town level to administer and facilitate program, expensive upfront costs for homeowners, approval and implementation process takes a long time, equity considerations, relocation assistance and other services may be needed, assistance for renters vs homebuyers is varied and needs to be addressed, condo and multi-family home structure implications
    - Addressing Challenges:
        - Finding a dedicated funding source to offset local match requirements such as found in Austin, TX and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC.

- Strategic Partnerships such as LA SAFE found in Louisiana.
- Public education and transparency to ensure property owners understand the process, managing expectations early in the process, and finding ways to educate property owners about flood risks
- Strategic acquisition strategy like Blue Acres or Norfolk, VA, focusing on acquiring larger parcels instead of a checkerboard approach
- Dedicated staff at the local level to implement the program, work with homeowners, and liaison between local and state level

Mr. Bassett

- Asked if property acquisition includes the structure and the land, or just the structure. Ms. Gilbert stated that acquisition includes the structure and the land. The town would then take over the land.

Ms. Bashline

- Asked if the value of the land decreases due to repetitive flooding. She also asked if the costs of the elevation project increase during the project and this causes a delay, what happens if the timeline isn't met. Ms. Gilbert stated FEMA is open to adjusting timelines due to unforeseen circumstances as needed. Ms. Durfee stated her understanding is that there are multi-level valuation assessments for acquisition properties and there is a final valuation assessment prior to the property being "sold" for the acquisition program.
- Prices for labor and materials could increase between the application submission, application approval, and start of work. Ms. Hale stated that NH HSCM's focus is getting the project done and is willing to use allocated grant money in ways that are fair and within the scope of the project. If the grant funding is used up, that could provide challenges.

Resource of Interest: Opportunities for Federal Support of Community Driven Relocation

5. Draft 2024 Year in Review and Goals for 2025 – (15 mins)

Tabled for next meeting

6. Discussion on Planning, Funds, Bills (15 mins) (tentative)

a. Representative Chris Muns

Rep Muns

- Provided an update on recent legislation he has filed.
- HB 595, originally titled *An Act Relevant to Coastal Resilience Zones* but the scope was changed during draft to address flooding everywhere in NH. The intention of changing the scope was to garner support from people throughout the state and not just the coast. There are 4 main components to the bill:
    - *Add flood resiliency improvements to the definition of qualifying improvements* under existing legislation that provides for C PACE funding. PACE funding is Property Assessed Clean Energy Projects. PACE was established to help homeowners with high upfront capital costs associated with improving their properties. Under PACE, if an improvement qualifies for this funding, property owners are allowed to repay the cost through an additional line item on their property tax bill. This program currently exists for commercial properties. Rep Muns requested addition of a residential PACE program. This would require municipalities to identify a flood zone or a qualifying improvement zone.

- *Add a program that enables municipalities to offer property owners who engage in flood resilience projects* to offer a temporary freeze in the property tax assessment or offer a property tax abatement. This would help property owners finance property improvements.
- *Enables individual municipalities to assess a fee on properties in a designated flood resilience zone* that would be deposited into a non-lapsing Flood Resilience Investment Fund. The fund would have the ability to take in money from other sources such as federal or state grant programs or private donations. The fund would disburse funds to home and commercial property owners in the flood resilience zone to help offset some of the costs incurred to do their flood resilience projects.
- *Provide $500K to the Department of Business and Economic Affairs to conduct a statewide economic analysis of the potential and actual impacts of flooding on the state's economy.* This would help inform ways to make the state more flood resilient and encourage funding.

- If HB 595 passes, it is hoped that this would encourage more public/private partnerships for funding to address flooding concerns.

Ms. Durfee

- Requested clarification for how an audit would work to understand the cost benefit of the investment in flood resiliency. How do you evaluate the cost benefit of flood mitigation? Rep Muns stated cost benefit analysis wording is in current legislation, but he added language to lower the requirement for flood mitigation and only require the home owner to verify that the requested work was done.

Mr. Diener

- Stated that a previous SHEA report attempted to calculate economic impact of flooding by estimating potential property tax losses to a town depending on the number of structures lost in the town. The loss calculations were based on estimates of a 1% loss up to a 25% loss. The calculations were based on scenarios from one to three feet of flooding, with and without storm surge.

Rep Muns

- Stated that HB 595 is intended to be just one of many tools in the toolkit for flood resilience.
- Stated it would be good to have a consolidated Flood Resilience Action Plan, so all stakeholders are informed and empowered.
- Constituents have communicated similar fears about coastal flooding during Rep Muns door to door conversations.

Ms. Hale

- Stated that the latest DES grant and the recent hiring of a full-time coastal resilience coordinator have created the opportunity to work on consolidating all of the information Rep Muns referred to. This will be a Roadmap. The Roadmap will break the infrastructure and natural resources into categories and identify potential funding resources. The Roadmap will identify current status, future vision, and opportunity gaps. The Roadmap will be organized based on a building perspective, zoning board perspective, conservation perspective, coastal resilience perspective, etc. The goal is to provide outreach to present the Roadmap to stakeholders in an accessible and useable way.

Ms. Bashline

- Asked Rep Muns to keep renters in mind when considering legislation for flood mitigation efforts.

7. CHAT membership update (2 min)

Ms. Durfee

- Stated there are no ZBA members available to attend CHAT meetings at this time. She will send the agendas and updates to the ZBA and request the chair to share the information with members.
- There is no update from the Selectboard regarding a replacement member.

8. Next meeting: February 18, 2025

9. Adjourn

Members of the public are welcome at CHAT meetings. Visit https://shea4nh.org/coastal-hazards-adaptation-team-chat/ to learn about CHAT. Please contact CHAT coordinator Liz Durfee at efd.planning@gmail.com if you have questions about how to join on Zoom. During the meeting, please:

- *Keep your microphone on mute to minimize background noise*
- *Use the hand raise function or type in the chat box if you have a question or comment*
- *Stay on topic*
- *Be respectful of all meeting participants*