
Coastal Hazards Adaptation Team (CHAT) Work Session #75

Tuesday, August 19, 2025

1:00–3:00 pm

VIRTUAL MEETING

MINUTES

1. Present

Ben Ritt – Hampton Coastal Resilience Coordinator
Ward Galanis – Hampton Planning Board
Brianna Hagan – Hampton Conservation Coordinator
Jen Gilbert – DES Coastal Program
Tom Bassett – Hampton Resident Representative
Jason Bachand – Hampton Town Planner
Chris Muns – State Representative (left at 2:00 pm)
Maddie DiIunno – Rockingham Planning Commission
Jen Hale – DPW Director
Scott Blair – Hampton Budget Committee
Steven LaBranche - Hampton Resident Representative
Kate Bashline - Hampton Resident Representative
Rayann Dionne – Seabrook-Hamptons Estuary Alliance

Guests:

Elizabeth Ferland – Keene City Manager
Rebecca Landry – Keene Deputy City Manager

2. Hampton's Emergency Alerts Systems/Processes Update

Mr. Ritt shared additional information about Hampton's emergency alert system that he learned since CHAT's last meeting. He explained that the Town has to go through HSEM (spell out) to connect with the State's cell phone emergency alert system. Our EMD, Chief McMahon, is responsible for sending over the alert or designating a person after necessary training. The town has to set a series of criteria for identifying which types of events trigger an alert to the surrounding area. The alert message is entered into an automated system that connects with the local cell phone towers to send out the message - one of the best methods for contacting people, including residents, but also visitors in the area.

There was a question last month about using the sirens for alerts that are tied to the Seabrook Power Plant. It appears that using these will most likely not be possible because they are specific to Power Plant emergencies for evacuation. There is concern that using the siren could cause confusion about the nature of the emergency. As a result, using the text message-based alerts appears most feasible at this time. Mr. Ritt noted that after an emergency cell phone communication is sent, the Town would shift its focus to reaching those without access to that level of technology, as well as the elderly and/or disabled who may require special attention. Acknowledged that it's a multi-step process.

3. Keene's Community Preparedness/Alerts Systems

Ms. Ferland and Ms. Landry addressed CHAT and shared Keene's experience with emergency communications, highlighting the challenges of reaching all residents during emergencies and the potential of the Genasys system (State of NH System – Genasys Protect Mobil app to receive emergency information – [2023 Press Release](#) to learn more) for both emergency alerts and subscription-based notifications.

The City of Keene is working to improve its emergency communications system. Deputy City Manager Rebecca and Emergency Management Director Kurt Blomquist (formerly Public Works Director) are leading the effort. Currently, the city uses multiple tools—its website, email alerts, social media, radio, and the state's messaging system—but each has limitations, and reaching all residents remains difficult.

A recent major water main break highlighted gaps: while the state helped issue a boil water advisory, not all residents received the alert. Training and formal policies are still needed before Keene can fully operate the state's Genesis alert system independently.

Keene sees potential to use this system not just for emergencies but also for practical notices, like winter parking bans, with residents able to subscribe to specific alerts. However, challenges remain, including carrier-related issues with SMS delivery, residents opting out of alerts, and ensuring that all community members stay informed.

Overall, Keene views Genesis as a valuable tool with multiple uses, but they are still troubleshooting technical and communication barriers before fully launching it. They discussed the importance of using multiple communication channels, including radio, social media, and door-to-door outreach, to ensure effective dissemination of information. The group also touched on the process of getting approved and trained to use the state system, with Elizabeth noting that internal policy development and training were the main bottlenecks.

Q & A Session

CHAT: How do you handle situations where people either don't text or don't have cell phones? Could you speak more about other forms of communication you use and how effective they've been?

Keene: Strong partnership with local radio and their website. Also, use WMUR TV when necessary (e.g., boil water advisories); social media and the city website with alert banners; and the local newspaper (Keene Sentinel, including the online version). Found that local Facebook groups (5–6 groups with thousands of members each) can reach a large portion of the Town's population, mostly recently tapped into for the boil water advisory.

CHAT: You also mentioned people who need to be contacted directly. How do you compile that list?

Keene: No formal list exists. Messaging emphasizes "neighbor helping neighbor."; door-to-door outreach used for neighborhood-level emergencies (done by fire or public works staff). Also, use

utility bill notices for non-urgent but broad communication. Once the state system is ready, there will be a strong push for residents to sign up through social media and other channels.

CHAT: How long does it take to be approved to use the state system, with documentation and training?

Keene: The state process is quick (sign a form, designate authorized staff). The slower part is internal: deciding roles, policies, procedures, and scheduling training. Training is set for September; this is the longest part because it requires coordination across departments.

CHAT: Did you look to other communities for guidance or templates when creating your internal policies?

Keene: No, Keene is mostly developing its own approach. Using an “administrative directive” (from the City Manager to staff). Emergency Management Director Court Blomquist is drafting policies, drawing on his extensive experience in contingency and hazard mitigation planning. Once training is complete, Keene will be happy to share policies and lessons learned.

CHAT: Do you use electronic billboards around town for messaging?

Keene: Yes, very effectively. Used for emergencies, road closures, events, and encouraging residents to sign up for alerts.

CHAT: What about regular testing of the emergency alert system? Some communities test monthly.

Keene: Agree testing is important. Plan to conduct a tabletop exercise and live test once the system is ready.

CHAT: Concerned that alerts are relying too heavily on internet or cell service, which may fail in emergencies. What about sirens, like those used during flooding in Texas or historically for the Seabrook power plant?

Keene: Keene likely won’t use sirens, because its emergencies (like flooding) are usually predictable in advance. In urgent cases, police or fire could drive through neighborhoods with sirens/loudspeakers. Emphasized the use of all available tools, recognizing that different people rely on different channels.

4. Relevant Flood Updates

Mr. Muns – NH State Representative

Noted that if moving forward with expanding or enhancing Hampton’s Emergency Alert system or processes requires any state-level legislation, to let him know prior to September 9th.

Mr. Ritt – Coastal Resilience Coordinator

Shared that Hurricane Erin is expected to stay offshore, with the most significant impacts felt in the Carolinas and Virginia. For New England, including the New Hampshire seacoast, effects

will be limited but could resemble minor storm surge impacts between Thursday evening and Friday evening. Mr. Ritt shared a few NOAA-predicted tide and storm tracking maps. With tides already running high at about 9.5 feet, even a modest surge could push water levels into the minor street-flooding range, though nothing close to the severity of the January 2024 storms. In addition, the storm will create hazardous rip currents, and officials have already noted a high number of lifeguard rescues this season. Residents should exercise caution at the beach and be aware of possible temporary flooding in low-lying coastal areas. Hampton is preparing to issue public notices through town websites and alert systems, with NOAA maps and visuals expected to be included to help residents understand the risks.

Mr. Bassett – Meadow Pond Neighborhood

The neighborhood continues to see the benefits of improved drainage infrastructure, with far less flooding than in the past despite tides frequently exceeding 9.5 feet. The only recent exception was on August 14, when a flash flooding event occurred due to over an inch of rain falling in just 45 minutes at the same time as an incoming tide at Meadow Pond. Work on the Kings Highway–Meadow Pond Drainage Project is progressing, with a large catchment basin and pump system under construction to direct water toward the marsh. Delivery of the pump is expected in mid-September, at which point Phase 1 of the project should become fully operational, followed by final paving of local streets. In the meantime, grading, paving, and landscaping improvements are underway, with DPW oversight to ensure effective drainage design.

A recent workshop also brought together regional participants to discuss Meadow Pond's broader role in coastal resilience, highlighting opportunities for restoration and lessons for Hampton as a whole. Looking ahead, neighborhood monitoring of flood events will continue in partnership with local officials to assess the project's effectiveness.

At the same time, residents remain opposed to redevelopment plans at 931 Ocean Boulevard, particularly the requested parking variance, which they argue could reduce the community's adaptive capacity during flood events.

Mr. Diener – SHEA Small Grants Program

Through a congressionally directed spending grant received last year, SHEA is launching a new small grants program to support the Hampton-Seabrook Estuary Management Plan. Applications will open on August 30 and are due by October 15 for the first round of funding. Eligible applicants include municipalities, nonprofits, academic institutions, and others working within the estuary watershed. Projects must advance at least one of the five estuary management goals, include an outreach component, and cannot involve demolition, construction, or ground disturbance. Grant awards will generally range from \$5,000–\$25,000, with four funding rounds available through December 2026. All projects must be completed by January 2028, meaning later applicants will have less time to carry out their work. A webinar will be held in early September, led by SHEA's Collaborative Coordinator, Colette, who will also host office hours to discuss project ideas. More information and application details are available on SHEA's [website](#).

Mr. LaBranche – Requested a Hampton Ditch Remediation Update

Mr. Ritt and Ms. Hale shared that the NH DES Coastal Program is moving forward with four pilot ditch remediation projects aimed at reducing ponding and improving marsh health. While the process has been slower than hoped, it is progressing. Funding for this work is in place

through the America the Beautiful grant program, with DES as the lead applicant. Hampton has over \$600,000 committed for this initiative, pending final approval from the Governor and Council. The plan is to build on the 2019 Flood Studies, expanding them into a multi-year program that includes design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of success. With engineered plans and local matching funds secured, the project is considered ready for bid, with work expected to begin once approvals are finalized and the growing season allows. Mr. Diener added that there are also efforts in Hampton Falls at the end of Depot Rd in coordination with UNH and NH Audubon, with funding from Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), to do some ditch remediation work on a salt marsh parcel owned by Audubon. Also noted that SHEA, through its contract with FB Environmental, will be conducting a baseline assessment of the estuary's health that can help to inform future management and restoration work.

Ms. Bashline – Sunvalley Dune Restoration Work

On Wednesday, at the Portsmouth Avenue dune, Tracy Degnan, Rockingham County's Invasive Species Specialist, will begin treating the oriental bittersweet that has been spreading across the dune. All necessary permits are in place, and the treatment is expected to take about six weeks to take full effect. This effort will support the growth and long-term health of the dune and is being coordinated with support from the Flood Ready Neighborhood initiative. This marks an important step in addressing a long-standing management goal for the site. Ms. Dionne encouraged Ms. Bashline to share at a future meeting, before-and-after photos to highlight the progress.

Ms. Gilbert – NHDES Coastal Program – PREPARE Project

The Coastal Program is leading the PREPARE project, which focuses on helping coastal communities build resilience and ensure a more equitable recovery from flood events, drawing lessons from past disasters like the Mother's Day and Patriots Day floods. The project, which began in January with an advisory group and recently brought a consultant on board in July, will run through March of next year. Starting in September, the team will launch stakeholder engagement to gather input from coastal communities about their flood recovery capacity, needs, gaps, and barriers. They will also work with community-based organizations to better understand how vulnerable populations are contacted and supported during recovery. A public input survey will also be shared to gather broader community feedback on flood recovery efforts.

Ms. Dionne – SHEA's National Estuaries Week Activities

SHEA is preparing to celebrate National Estuaries Week, which takes place the third week of September. As part of the celebration, they have launched a photo contest and a coloring contest (more [details](#)), with details shared in their newsletter and links available for participation. Community members are encouraged to submit photos or share coloring pages with children. Additional events are also being planned for the week, and more information will be shared soon.

5. Coastal Resilience Planning Discussion

Mr. Ritt discussed the importance of resilience in Hampton, focusing on coastal hazards and the need to address not only physical flooding but also social and economic resilience. He explained the resilience cycle, which includes planning, resistance, recovery, and adaptation phases, and emphasized the need to consider multiple layers of resilience. He invited the group to think about

ways to enhance Hampton's resilience, particularly in coastal areas, beyond traditional flood mitigation strategies. Mr. Diener clarified that the focus was on coastal resilience. Ms. Bashline mentioned Hampton's Earth Day Month, which featured a film about coastal flooding (Inundation District) with great content. The film director was present to discuss the film, but it did not draw a large crowd.

Coastal Resilience: Social and Economic Focus

The group discussed expanding their focus on coastal resilience to include social and economic dimensions beyond physical infrastructure, with Mr. Ritt proposing a broader approach to community engagement and resilience building. Mr. Bassett raised questions about how this proposal differs from their current work, which primarily focuses on specific physical resiliency recommendations. Mr. Ladd highlighted the opportunity to address tensions between the town and state regarding shared responsibilities and costs for coastal infrastructure.

Hampton Emergency Temperature Response Plan

The group discussed emergency response plans for extreme temperature events in Hampton. Mr. Ritt explained that the town has internal policies for opening cooling and warming centers, with the police station training room as a primary location. Ms. Hale noted that while there are plans in place, they are currently internal and not easily accessible to the public. The group agreed that more information should be made available to residents about where to find emergency shelter information and how to prepare for different types of emergencies. They discussed using the town website, local radio stations, and other communication channels to disseminate this information.

6. Approve meeting notes from July 2025

Mr. LaBranche motioned to approve the July 2025 with edits provided

Second by Mr. Galanis

Vote: All in favor

7. Adjourned

Meeting adjourned at 2:52 pm