Coastal Hazards Adaptation Team (CHAT) Work Session #80

Tuesday, March 17, 2026

1:00–3:00 pm

VIRTUAL MEETING

MINUTES

1. Present

Jason Bachand – Hampton Town Planner
Kate Bashline - Hampton Resident Representative
Jason Bachand – Hampton Town Planner
Scott Blair – Hampton Budget Committee
Annie Cox – Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership, left at 2:00 pm
Jay Diener – Conservation Commission
Rayann Dionne – Seabrook-Hamptons Estuary Alliance
Ward Galanis – Hampton Planning Board
Jennifer Gilbert – NHDES Coastal Program
Jennifer Hale – Hampton DPW Director
Steven LaBranche - Hampton Resident Representative
Bob Lad - Hampton Beach Village District
Maddie DiIonno – Rockingham Planning Commission
Ben Ritt – Hampton Coastal Resilience Coordinator

Guest
Bart McDonough – Town of Newmarket Planner

2. Member Updates

Mr. Bachand – Hampton Town Planner

Mr. Bachand provided an update on recent town meeting results, noting that all 9 zoning articles passed, including housing-related amendments, solar and telecommunications ordinance rewrites, and coastal resilience incentive zones. Election Results

Ms. Bashline – Sunvalley Update (photos attached)

Ms. Bashline raised a question about parking placard programs during winter storms. She shared photos of the Sunvalley shoreline and near the bridge following the February nor'easters, noting that less severe weather conditions helped protect dunes and beaches. She also pointed out advancements in bridge construction and how quickly it's moving along.

Mr. Ritt – Coastal Resilience Coordinator

Mr. Ritt announced that the finalized Hampton Coastal Resilience Roadmap would be presented on April 1st at 5:30 PM at the Senior Recreation Center. He encouraged CHAT members to sign up.

Ms. Dionne – Seabrook-Hamptons Estuary Alliance

Ms. Dionne shared that SHEA had recently completed its review of the second round of applicants in the Hampton-Seabrook Estuary Management Plan small grants program. SHEA was pleased with the variety of projects, and she looks forward to sharing the selected projects once contracts are finalized.

3. Learning

Town of Newmarket's Adoption of CRIZ (Coastal Resilience Incentive Zone)

Newmarket's Town Planner, Bart McDonough, presented their newly adopted CRIZ (RSA 79-E4-a) aimed at incentivizing property owners to improve resilience in vulnerable areas along tidal rivers. This incentive zone/program allows municipalities to provide property tax abatements for qualifying projects costing at least $75,000 or 15% of the pre-rehabilitation assessed value. The zone was approved by the town council in October 2025, with staff now working to develop criteria for qualifying projects by the end of spring. Mr. Bachand noted that in Hampton, the initiative is in its early stages following recent town meeting approval.

Mr. McDonough shared that while Newmarket's new tax relief, CRIZ, has been passed, no property owners have approached him yet about potential projects, though he identified downtown properties and mill buildings as likely candidates for future use. Mr. McDonough indicated plans to conduct outreach to property owners later in the year, once program rules are established. Mr. Ritt reported already receiving inquiries from Hampton residents interested in using the new mechanism. Mr. McDonough and Ms. Hale raised concerns about how to determine appropriate qualifying improvements and potential impacts on the tax base, suggesting the need for careful consideration of community impact and possibly capping the program's scope.

The group shifted to discussing the delineation of special flood hazard areas and CRIZ (Coastal Resilience Incentive Zone) mapping, with Mr. Ritt clarifying that NOAA developed the overall mapping scheme. Ms. Hale explained that while FEMA delineates special flood hazard areas, CRIZ considers additional factors beyond loss data. Ms. Gilbert shared that HB1286 is a proposed amendment to make CRIZ more applicable to all flood-prone areas, not just coastal areas. However, it recently received an "inexpedient to legislate" vote, indicating it is unlikely to move forward in the current session. Ms. Dionne noted that Representative Munns had hoped to join today to share more on the status of this bill, but unfortunately had a meeting conflict.

Mr. Ritt shared his interest in developing a similar conceptual model to Delaware's I-Adapt to help residents understand available options based on their property's flood vulnerability and personal preferences, and to assist in calculating the impact of potential incentives. He noted that some previous attempts with the Forerunner software team were shelved due to concerns about generative AI hallucinations and misinformation.

Ms. Dionne asked whether RPC might consider forming a working group to support communities exploring these initiatives, given that Newmarket and Hampton are working through the process. Ms. DiIonno said RPC has been supportive of these efforts and is willing to provide support in a manner helpful to the interested communities. It would be a good opportunity to discuss implementation and share lessons learned.

Overview of remaining Higher Floodplain Standards (slides attached)

Mr. Bachand presented an overview of six remaining higher floodplain management standards that have not yet been addressed in the town's updated floodplain management ordinance. He reviewed each standard's purpose and prior public feedback, highlighting challenges and implementation considerations. Key discussion points included the potential administrative burden on the building department for tracking cumulative improvements and damage, the complexity of a coastal hazard overlay district, and the need for further research and community engagement.

The group discussed the possibility of using new technologies, such as Forerunner, to support tracking efforts and considered the potential overlap between the coastal hazard overlay district and the CRIZ mapping. The consensus was to have CHAT members review and prioritize which of these higher floodplain standards they would be interested in exploring further in advance of the next CHAT meeting. These results would be discussed in April and could be shared with the Planning Board and Master Plan Implementation Committee.

4. CHAT 2025 Review and Planning

Mr. Diener motioned to approve the 2025 CHAT Year in Review
Second by Mr. Galanis
Vote: All in favor

5. Meeting Approval

February Meeting Minutes
Mr. Galanis motioned to approve the February 2026 with edits provided
Second by Mr. Diener
Vote: All in favor

6. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 2:25 pm.

Sunvalley February 2026

Sunvalley February 2026

Sunvalley February 2026

Menu of Higher Floodplain Management Standards

~~Higher Standard #1: Prohibit construction of new critical facilities within the Special Flood Hazard Area.~~

Higher Standard #2: Amend Substantial Improvement Definition to require improvements to a building be tracked cumulatively over time.

Higher Standard #3: Amend Substantial Damage Definition to require repairs to a building be tracked cumulatively over a period of time.

Higher Standard #4: Lower Substantial Improvement and Damage Thresholds.

Higher Standard #5: Adopt a Coastal Hazard Overlay District.

Higher Standard #6: Change maximum impervious cover limitation to 50% in the Special Flood Hazard Area.

Higher Standard #7: Adopt a compensatory storage requirement.

~~Higher Standard #8: Require the lowest floor (Zone A) and lowest horizontal structural member (Zone V) of all new construction and/or substantially improved structures within the special flood hazard area be elevated to the Sea Level Rise Design Flood Elevation (SLR DFE) using Table 1 .~~

~~Higher Standard #9: Elevate utilities and mechanicals to the same level required for the lowest floor.~~

Higher Standard #2: Amend Substantial Improvement Definition to require improvements to a building be tracked cumulatively over time

What it means:

The Floodplain Management Ordinance defines a Substantial Improvement as any reconstruction, rehabilitation, addition, or improvement of a structure, the cost of which equals or exceeds 50% of the market value of the structure before the “start of construction” of the improvement. However, this definition does not include the cumulative tracking of improvements. If updated, a timeframe for such tracking (limited or indefinite) would also need to be defined.

What we heard:

This proactive approach can help better protect flood-prone structures before they experience damage in a coastal flooding event.

Property owners have worked around the 50% requirement by spacing out their projects over time.

Concern about tracking the value of the projects over time especially in situations of changes of ownership and putting more work on the Building Department.

The success of this potential revision hinges upon the Building Department's support.

The timeframe should be one year so as to be fair to all homeowners who may not be able to afford significant projects.

Higher Standard #3: Amend Substantial Damage Definition to require repairs to a building be tracked cumulatively over a period of time

What it means:

The Floodplain Management Ordinance defines Substantial Damage as damage of any origin sustained by a structure whereby the cost of restoring the structure to its before damaged condition would equal or exceed 50% of the market value of the structure before the damage occurred. However, this definition does not include the cumulative tracking of repairs. If updated, a timeframe for such tracking (limited or indefinite) would also need to be defined.

What we heard:

This appears to be the only way, locally, we would have to track properties with significant multiple flooding impacts.

Tracking substantial damage cumulatively should address the repetitive loss properties.

Helps us prevent properties from traveling down the repetitive loss path.

Similar to the previous question, this needs Building Department support and buy-in.

Need to consider an automated way for tracking.

This is a tough one because damage is accidental. Most insurance will only cover what you have not what you will "need by regulation" to rebuild.

Higher Standard #4: Lower Substantial Improvement and Damage Thresholds

What it means:

The Floodplain Management Ordinance sets Substantial Improvement and Substantial Damage thresholds at equaling or exceeding 50% of the market value of the structure. Lower thresholds would trip NFIP requirements earlier, which could help to expedite any compliance issues.

What we heard:

Hampton's repetitive loss has jumped from ~40 to ~130 in the last few years is both significant and only represents a fraction of the actual number because it only tracks those with flood insurance.

Lowering the threshold would mean that damaged structures would more quickly be brought into NFIP compliance, resulting in less damage and repair costs in the future.

Tacking onto the NFIP which already is a system in place can be a way that we work towards better resiliency (supports 40%).

50% is the FEMA threshold, why make it more stringent?

Support a lower percent for improvements, but not for repairs, as repairs need to be made quickly.

Higher Standard #5: Adopt a Coastal Hazard Overlay District

What it means:

This would be a zoning district depicted on the Town's Zoning Map and described in the Zoning Ordinance have higher regulatory standards to protect against flood impacts from sea-level rise and coastal storm surge. The requirements of the underlying zoning district still apply, except if/where they conflict with the specific requirements of the overlay. This could include incorporating sea level rise projections into development scenarios and extending the district outside of the Special Flood Hazard Area where conditions warrant.

What we heard:

Prefer to focus energy on enhancing or expanding what we already have on the books than creating something new.

Like the idea of exploring the expansion of the floodplain ordinance to include the 500-year floodplain.

Supportive of the concept, depending on the details.

Would like to see more data regarding the impacts of this change.

Will require extensive discussion and review before proceeding.

Should be proposed independently, and during a different year, from any of the other higher standards.

Higher Standard #6: Change maximum impervious cover limitation to 50% in the Special Flood Hazard Area.

What it means:

An impervious surface (also referred to as “sealed surface” or “lot coverage”) is any modified surface that cannot effectively absorb or infiltrate water. Currently, the maximum impervious coverage allowed is either 60% or 75% depending on the zoning district (it is also lower for lots located in the Groundwater Protection District). There is also significant flexibility for properties with greater coverage, including for redevelopment, provided they were lawfully existing prior to March 2014. This standard would set the limit at 50% and eliminate the existing flexibility in most cases.

What we heard:

This proactive approach can help better protect flood-prone structures before they experience damage in a coastal flooding event.

Support a change to add this for existing non-conforming to remain when people redevelop as well not just new construction.

There will be a lot of pushback - there already is substantial pushback with current impervious coverage limitations and a severe lack of understanding.

Fully support this and think it is an important step forward, but there will need to be a lot of outreach and education.

Not opposed conceptually. Just not confident, given some of the tiny beach lots (especially along the backside of Ashworth Ave), that this is feasible.

Could make future projects which promote the economic vitality of Hampton Beach unattainable.

Higher Standard #7: Adopt a compensatory storage requirement

What it means:

Compensatory storage is the creation of new, excavated floodwater storage volume to replace any existing capacity lost due to development, filling, or construction within a floodplain. It ensures that displacing floodwater does not increase flood risks for others, typically requiring a 1:1 or greater ratio of excavated volume to lost volume, often at similar elevations.

What we heard:

No filling should be allowed in the floodplain. If an area is filled, it will just force the tidal and storm waters to go someplace else, likely on someone else's property.

Generally not in favor of options that allow developers to "pay off" their impacts.

Managing mitigation in this way could be administratively challenging.

Not opposed, but there are other potential updates that could have a more significant impact.

The State of MA requires this for development and it makes total sense!

This storage technique is supported by many experts - we should attend to their opinions.

Adopting this higher standard could help minimize flooding and be protective of our water resources.

How Should We Continue Forward?

Initial discussions occurred in 2025 regarding the next possible higher standards to consider. These were:
#2: Substantial Improvement Definition
#3: Substantial Damage Definition
#7: Compensatory Storage (initial draft ordinance language was also prepared)

None of these advanced to the 2026 Town Meeting due to the number of major zoning amendments already in progress.

With the recent completion of the Zoning Ordinance Audit, 2027 will also be a very busy zoning year.

BUT…

At least one higher floodplain management standard should advance to the 2027 ballot to sustain momentum and support ongoing resilience efforts.

Initial Thoughts?