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Strategy for a Resilient Vermont

Oct. 23 (12:00-1:15 pm) and Oct. 27 (6:00-7:15 pm) via Zoom
Hosted by the Climate Action Office in the Agency of Natural Resources

Overview

The state developed the Resilience Implementation Strategy to strengthen Vermont communities against flooding, drought, wildfire smoke, and other climate-related hazards. The Climate Action Office (CAO) in the Agency of Natural Resources hosted these meetings in partnership with the State Treasurer's Office to offer participants an opportunity to learn about the Strategy, which builds on existing state government initiatives and identifies immediate actions and potential funding opportunities to advance resilience across Vermont.

A total of 113 people attended the two sessions and were invited to provide input. This document summarizes key themes and ideas shared by participants, both verbally and in the chat.

- [View presentation slides](#)
- Watch the meeting recordings ([October 23](#), [October 27](#))

Detailed summary

Participants were given two opportunities to ask questions and share their thoughts. The feedback from both meetings is summarized below, organized by theme. *Answers to participant questions are shown in italics.*

- **Enhancing public education**
 - Has there been general discussion about public education on climate change and its effects, particularly to help people understand climate hazards and effective responses?
 - *Answer: There is not a specific action focused on education broadly, as that is a core component of the Climate Action Office's work. The Strategy itself is intended to complement and build on other state climate initiatives, including the Climate Action Plan, which emphasizes education around climate action at all levels.*

- A participant recommended that libraries be used as key venues for public education on climate issues, emphasizing their role in making information accessible and reaching diverse audiences across Vermont.
- **Improving language and communications access**
 - There is a need to ensure that all education and emergency warning information is fully accessible to deaf, deafblind, hard-of-hearing, and blind Vermonters, so they can understand their options for minimizing risks from climate impacts.
 - *Answer: We're excited about building upon ongoing outreach efforts, including expanding accessibility for deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. The Strategy includes recommendations to strengthen communication channels for sharing emergency alerts and climate resilience information through trusted community networks.*
 - A participant suggested creating a dedicated app to ensure timely and accessible emergency alerts for deaf, deafblind, and hard-of-hearing individuals, noting that current systems do not meet their needs.
 - *Answer: There is an action focused on evaluating and piloting alternative platforms for delivering emergency alerts. Implementing this will involve partnering with groups that have strong connections with communities that may not use traditional alert systems.*
 - A participant suggested using local interpreters from Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity, who offer culturally sensitive interpretation rather than word-for-word translation. They also recommended that CAO involve community ambassadors in more events to help share information within their communities and ensure messages are fully understood.
 - A participant echoed the importance of using local translation and interpretation services that understand varying linguistic and cultural needs. Collaboration among local businesses, agencies, and organizations is essential, and there is a local interpreter agency that is well-equipped to support outreach.
 - If sustainable hotline funds become available, how will the Resilience Implementation Strategy allocate ongoing resources to re-establish a multilingual resilience hotline?
 - During the 2023 Montpelier flood, there was no communication access - emergency information wasn't accessible to the deaf, deafblind, or hard-of-hearing community. This must be a priority in strategic planning, ensuring all emergency updates include closed captions and proficient ASL interpretation so everyone has equal access to vital information.
 - *Answer: Building on lessons from the 2023 floods, the Strategy includes an action to create equity-focused emergency management training co-developed with community leaders representing BIPOC, low-income, disabled, older adult, and rural Vermonters. It aims to improve equitable service and information*

sharing, address structural inequities, and ensure culturally competent crisis communication.

- **Consistent messaging on available resources/programs**
 - A participant emphasized that consistent and clear communication helps residents, communities, and municipalities reliably access programs, improving efficiency and supporting psychological safety.
- **Agency responsibility**
 - Have all the agencies designated as leads for these actions confirmed their willingness to take on that responsibility?
 - *Answer: The work was led by a steering committee made up of many of the strategies' implementing agencies, who collaboratively developed and prioritized the actions in the Strategy. Moving these actions forward will require continued agency commitment and capacity, and all participating agencies have expressed interest in ongoing coordination to advance this work.*
- **Land access and affordability**
 - How will this Strategy protect farmland from development and make it more affordable for farmers?
 - *Answer: This Strategy includes actions to expand farmland access for historically underserved, new, and small-scale farmers, strengthen succession programs, and match current farmers and forest landowners with the new generation of producers, in an effort to protect Vermont's local food systems and ensure farms remain economically viable. Other statewide plans, like 30x30 (Act 59), consider this issue in more detail.*
- **Monitoring progress**
 - How will progress on these strategies be tracked?
 - *Answer: Beyond its work on cutting climate pollution and investing in resilience, the CAO also focuses on communications, community engagement, and tracking progress across state government. The CAO is developing a tool to help decision-makers understand how our actions impact climate goals. Since completing phase one to define key metrics, CAO is now working towards building the [Climate Action Tracker](#).*
- **Collaboration and sharing resources**
 - How can successful local actions (for example, as Johnson's Municipal Roads General Permit, which increased water-carrying capacity by more than 50%) inform broader state policy and help break down silos between communities and agencies?
 - *Answer: The Strategy is an effort to align and build on existing state climate initiatives, identifying the best opportunities for state government to invest in. CAO, within the Agency of Natural Resources and overseen by an Interagency Advisory Board, works to coordinate and amplify climate action across government. The CAO also hosts the [Municipal Climate Toolkit](#) on their website,*

which provides case studies for municipalities to learn from one another.

- A participant suggested that the state create a monitored website where people share vetted best practices in areas such as workforce development, economic development, and recovery.
 - *Answer: The [Municipal Climate Toolkit](#) case studies provide a few examples. Case studies can be added by emailing anr.cao@vermont.gov*
- What is the state doing to decrease competition amongst towns for limited resources?
 - *Answer: The Resilience Implementation Strategy includes an opening statement from Treasurer Pieciak and Secretary Moore that highlights five priority actions, including sustainable funding for the Flood Resilient Communities Fund and the Municipal Climate Recovery Fund. It also focuses on expanding access to disaster recovery resources and improving technical assistance to help lower-capacity communities apply for funding opportunities.*

- **Funding and financing**

- It's important to educate Vermonters about how federal cuts (e.g., to Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities grants and FEMA funding) impact resilience and risk reduction efforts, and to clarify the state's strategy for communicating and addressing funding needs.-
 - *Answer: The CAO, with state partners on our Interagency Advisory Board, compiles an [annual climate spending report](#) highlighting state investments in climate action and their alignment with federal funding. Following federal policy shifts and potential rollbacks, they reassessed climate investments last spring and updated the report. The next edition will again outline state spending, identify vulnerabilities to federal cuts, and communicate these risks to legislators, officials, and the public.*
- A participant emphasized the importance of thinking about how to prioritize limited government funds.
- A participant expressed support for the strategies outlined to fund municipal and community projects quickly, flexibly, and at scale with expedited implementation. They noted that simplifying municipal-facing project intake and coordinating funding at the state level would greatly help communities with limited staff and reduce administrative burden.
- If the state wants to build resilience, it must recognize that infrastructure projects take time and cannot rely solely on short-term funding.
 - *Answer: Two of the five priority actions put forward in the Secretary and Treasurer's opening remarks focus on expanding capacity for long-term funding sources, including the Flood Resilient Communities Fund and the Municipal Climate Recovery Fund in partnership with the Vermont Bond Bank. That program had been used for budgetary relief in the flood recovery, but the program's*

expansion could also fund proactive infrastructure adaptation projects.

- Does the \$270 million one-time cost include infrastructure upgrades?
 - *Answer: Of the 48 priority actions informing the \$270 million cost estimate, some involve infrastructure upgrades but don't specify exact sites. Hydraulic studies, such as the elevated by the Treasurer may help identify some specific locations for future investments.*
- Does the \$270 million include communication access costs, especially for early warning and emergency response?
 - *Answer: The Strategy includes actions to improve access to interpreted information before and during disasters. An action focused on piloting other emergency communications methods was not costed as it is a Tier 2 action and would take further coordination and planning before an estimated cost could be assigned.*
 - *Answer: From the Treasurer's Office perspective, the cost estimates for the 48 actions are not final. The Strategy is an evolving document that will be updated with more detail, cost data, and adjusted priorities as new risks and hazards emerge.*
- Are banks also involved in supporting and financing this resilience program?
 - *Answer: We recognize the Strategy may feel limiting since it focuses on state agency resources, but building resilience requires partnership with nonprofits, businesses, financial institutions, and the public. The plan includes actions to support community organizations and collaborate with financial institutions to integrate climate resilience into various programs. A couple of the actions in the Strategy also identify programs or partnerships with the VT Bond Bank, an instrumentality of the state who to finance social and physical infrastructure for municipalities, school districts, and public bodies and are actively working to advance some of these actions.*
- A participant expressed support for strategies to slow and reduce runoff and suggested a development tax on new impervious surfaces to fund upper watershed protection.
- A participant suggested that the legislature consider allowing municipalities to incur limited debt without voter approval during emergencies such as washed-out roads.
- **Engaging with frontline communities**
 - A participant asked if materials could be provided in accessible formats.
 - *Answer: CAO is developing outreach materials to better communicate the Strategy, for example, a visually engaging publication and a 4-6 page translated summary for communities to be completed in December and shared to hopefully make it more accessible to Vermonters.*

- A participant highlighted the successful work of Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity Community Ambassadors during COVID and noted that they could bring the same energy and community connections to climate resilience efforts.
- **Additional input**
 - A participant suggested that the Strategy leverage beaver activity as an effective and inexpensive flood resilience tool.
 - Are the Strategy's cost estimates (\$270 million upfront and \$95 million annually) reliable enough to serve as the basis for a cost recovery demand to the potentially responsible parties under the Climate Superfund Act? If not, what additional work is needed to strengthen them?
 - *Answer: Cost recovery demands will be informed by the cost assessment developed by the Treasurer's Office under 10 V.S.A. § 599c which is currently in development.*

Spending prioritization activity

Participants were asked to rank the following items from highest priority to not a priority, based on what they felt should be prioritized for funding:

- Community-Centric Approach
- Early Warning Systems & Emergency Response
- Economic & Environmental Sustainability
- Infrastructure Design & Reinforcement
- Nature-Based Solutions
- Government Systems

At both meetings, **Infrastructure Design & Reinforcement**, as well as **Early Warning Systems & Emergency Response**, were given the highest priority, followed by the Community-Centric Approach.

Headline activity

Participants were asked to imagine it is 2035 and write a news headline for a local paper highlighting how actions from this Strategy have made a difference in the community following a climate-related disaster. A selection of headlines is shared below:

- Breaking news: heat wave adaptation strategies bring communities together through potlucks in air-conditioned spaces
- VT Farmers receive immediate emergency funds to make up for lost crops and infrastructure after the flood
- Surfs Up! High Water Leads to Outdoor Recreation Boom in Vermont!

- Vermont Survives and Thrives after Climate Emergency: State-Level Efforts Pay Off!
- Vermont sees minimal damage following unprecedented rain
- Neighbors help neighbors, as always
- It Could Have Been Worse: How Smart Investments Helped Vermont Weather the Latest Storm
- Communities gather to celebrate mitigation efforts despite record rainfall
- California adopts Vermont plan
- How much worse could this have been 10 years ago?
- Vermont meets its 30x30 conservation goal and, by doing so, supports communities in being more resilient
- Middlesex has incrementally moved away from its streams and rivers, and spent far less on this flood, because of our diligence in planning and funding from the state (Flood Communities Resilience Fund)
- Vermont municipal plans incorporate social resilience for climate change and help build community in the midst of a heat wave!
- Healthy floodplains in Vermont slowed and absorbed waters and protected downtowns
- Vermont's natural lands are providing ample protection to towns downstream while providing economic opportunities to their communities
- Largest Flood Ever, Minimal Losses, Quick Recovery Expected
- Storm of the millennia hits Vermont, and just two bridges are lost
- Thank you, Team Vermont! More to learn, but we're surviving!
- Neighbors have a plan for when access roads get washed away and help each other out!
- Let's learn from Vermont residents
- Vermont communities come together to celebrate success of resiliency throughout the state during natural disaster