

Maine Infrastructure Rebuilding and Resilience Commission

Preliminary Framework – FOR DELIBERATION ONLY

September 2024

Purpose of this document

This is an initial framework for themes and topics identified during community listening sessions, and by presentations and discussions among Commission members during Commission meetings. The framework is intended to organize topic areas and advance the Commission's conversations about its eventual recommendations and reports. This version gathers and organizes topics and discussions voiced by Commission members and expert speakers in the Commission's meetings. These themes and topics require further exploration and deliberation by the Commission and should not be interpreted as consensus or recommendations at this time.

Framework

The Commission's charge is to advance and support the State's approach to response, recovery, and rebuilding related to the disasters of the preceding eighteen months, and provide analysis, lessons and strategies from this recovery period.

At the Commission's first meeting on June 26, 2024, Dr. Sam Brody outlined four broad strategies for mitigating risk related to flooding and natural disasters: Avoidance, Accommodation, Resistance, and Communication. These strategies are widely accepted and frequently inform flood risk management planning around the world.

Subsequent meetings of the Commission generated the ideas below that could complement and implement elements of the four strategies. Fundamentally, the topics of Funding, Community Support, Data Sharing, Vulnerable Infrastructure, Energy Resilience, and Regulation encompass both the policies and the implementation actions for improving resilience to and recovery from future storms. Further work in the coming weeks will map the ideas below to the four strategies above.

I. FUNDING: Diversify and maximize access to funding for disaster recovery and proactive resilience projects. Potential recommendations may include:

- Explore state-level options for long-term funding of infrastructure resilience planning and projects, ensuring maximum use of federal funding.
- Reduce barriers to funding for small communities, (e.g., match and upfront costs). Options include:
 - Adopt FEMA's Consensus-Based Codes, Specifications, and Standards to speed the application process for federal Public Assistance recovery funding.
 - Increase the state's contribution to municipal cost-share for FEMA Public Assistance paired with incentives for communities to adopt proactive measures.
- Explore new options for managing risk, which may include:
 - increasing municipal participation in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and Community Rating System.
 - a voluntary buyout program for properties that experience repetitive damage from flooding.
 - a statewide insurance program for public infrastructure.

II. COMMUNITY SUPPORT: Support community readiness by strengthening communication, expanding capacity, and increasing assistance. Potential recommendations may include:

- Work with partners on practices to improve communications and information flows among state, county, and local governments before, during, and after emergencies.
- Increase the state's capacity (for example, at MEMA and the Floodplain Management Program) to assist communities to reduce natural hazard risks and to navigate NFIP and FEMA recovery funding requirements.
- Build regional capacity for emergency management and community assistance.
- Improve situational awareness of entities, projects, needs, and funding opportunities that support recovery and resilience.
- Formalize networks and contracts for disaster recovery services (e.g., debris management, construction contractors).
- Encourage philanthropy to support capacity-building, pilots, and community engagement for resiliency.

III. DATA SHARING: Improve data and information sharing to help state and local leaders make informed decisions about risk reduction for floods and other hazards. Potential recommendations may include:

- Consider the benefits of establishing a statewide flood data center to coordinate information sharing as well as data and research needs. In coordination with relevant state agencies, a center might maintain hydrologic models; support community-based programs to improve flood monitoring and prediction; and assist in the development of workforce for research, floodplain management, and mitigation strategies. Data needs could be addressed by:
 - Increasing the number of river gage stations and coastal tide gauges, and improve real-time access to water level monitoring and predictions.
 - Developing an inland flood risk model to complement the Maine Coastal Flood Risk Model currently under development by Maine DOT.
 - Analyze flood insurance data to develop a more accurate assessment of flood risk and mitigation opportunities.
- Develop "river corridor maps" for all municipalities that identify high-risk areas and protective natural floodplain functions.

IV. VULNERABLE INFRASTRUCTURE: Identify and strengthen critical community and economic infrastructure and access. Potential recommendations may include:

- Identify vulnerable community infrastructure such as culverts and stormwater facilities, water systems, and transportation assets. Identify vulnerable public and private infrastructure that are critical to local economies.
- Consider long-term funding options for improving the resilience of water and stormwater infrastructure.
- Preserve working waterfront infrastructure and access. Options include:
 - Inventory the highest risk/priority working waterfront areas.
 - Support community conversations about models for publicly owned working waterfront infrastructure with coordinated data and approaches.
 - Consider options to strengthen working waterfront infrastructure and protect access, such as: development fees or impact fees on non-marine dependent uses to assist with improvements to critical working waterfront infrastructure; and/or public, private,

and philanthropic rapid-response options for preserving working waterfront properties when they come on the market.

V. ENERGY RESILIENCE: Improve and strengthen critical energy and utility infrastructure and increase energy resilience.

- [to be added following the September 18 Commission meeting]

VI. REGULATORY: Reform state and local regulatory processes to support resiliency planning and efficient post-disaster rebuilding. Potential recommendations may include:

- Develop strategies to improve the efficiency of emergency regulatory approval processes for post-disaster rebuilding, including with more expertise and capacity in permit review agencies.
- Balance environmental protections with project expediency for recovery. For example, consider revisions to in-stream work windows, and increased use of permit-by-rule with a “pre-approved toolbox” approach of construction practices and solutions.
- Develop model ordinances that help communities protect natural floodplain functions, prevent new development in the highest risk areas, and reduce flood risk in floodplains.
- Explore ways for new buildings to be more flood resilient.
- Explore ways to make permitting accessible by smaller firms.