



GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF Policy Innovation and the Future

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Maine Infrastructure Rebuilding and Resilience Commission Releases Interim Report

Commission co-chairs visit Hallowell to announce preliminary recommendations to better prepare Maine for extreme weather

Hallowell, MAINE – The Maine Infrastructure Rebuilding and Resilience Commission today released an [interim report](#) presenting preliminary recommendations to improve the state's response, recovery, and rebuilding from extreme storms.

Governor Janet Mills [established](#) the 24-member Commission by Executive Order in May 2024 in the wake of several devastating storms, including the winter storms of nearly one year ago that caused an estimated \$90 million in damage to public infrastructure and untold damage to homes, businesses, and private infrastructure.

Since May, the Commission has traveled widely throughout Maine to visit communities on the front lines of storm-related damage and climate vulnerability. The co-chairs announced the interim report in Hallowell, where floodwaters from the Kennebec River inundated the downtown during the December 2023 storm. They are delivering the report, which identifies rebuilding and resilience priorities for Maine in the immediate and near term, to Governor Mills later today.

"Storms know no politics. They don't care if you are a Republican, Democrat, or Independent. They will flood our homes and businesses, washout our roads and bridges, and threaten the health and safety of our people. Just look at the devastation last winter's storms inflicted on people across Maine," **said Governor Janet Mills**. "That type of extreme weather will only become more frequent and more dangerous in the years to come, which is why we must act to strengthen our infrastructure to protect our people and our economy from these threats. I welcome the Commission's interim report and thank them for their hard work and for rising to the urgency of the moment. I look forward to reviewing their recommendations and to working with the Legislature to consider how we can better prepare for and respond to the storms on the horizon."

"We kicked off this Commission six months ago in my home of Stonington, which suffered multiple devastating blows in the January storms that struck Maine's working waterfronts and flooded inland communities," **said Commission Co-Chair Linda Nelson of Deer Isle, Director of Economic and Community Development for the Town of Stonington**. "As we traveled the state, one message became resoundingly clear — climate change is harming the daily lives and future prospects of Maine people, and our communities need help. This interim report responds to that message, urging bold actions now and into the future to strengthen our state's communities and infrastructure against future extreme storms."

"The work of this Commission is urgent and vital to Maine's future," **said Commission Co-Chair Dan Tishman of Port Clyde, a Principal and Chairman of Tishman Realty & Construction**. "The Commission has risen to the urgency -- delivering a set of common sense recommendations in just six months, including actions to help Maine prepare for winter storms that could be on our doorstep in just a few weeks' time."

"Hallowell and other communities across Maine are grappling with the effects of climate change on their people and infrastructure," **said Hannah Pingree, a Commission member and Director of the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, which is staffing the Commission**. "Extreme storms, storm surge, rising sea levels, inland flooding and other significant impacts will only intensify in the coming years. The work of this Commission will lay the foundation for how Maine prepares for and recovers from future disasters."

"The Commission's findings reaffirm the importance of both the Maine National Guard and Maine Emergency Management Agency's missions – to serve the people of Maine and be prepared for any contingency," **said Pete Rogers, Director of the Maine Emergency Management Agency**. "It is imperative that we continue to invest resources and efforts into Maine communities by increasing capacity for emergency planning, communication, expanding access to federal grants, promoting risk reduction, and

decreasing barriers to disaster recovery.”

“The City of Hallowell was hit hard by the December 2023 storm, like many riverfront communities in Maine,” **said Hallowell City Manager Gary Lamb**. “A river gauge alerted us to the flooding, allowing downtown businesses to salvage food, appliances, and merchandise. A massive outpouring of volunteers, owners, and employees, along with Public Works, Police and Fire Department personnel, made it possible. But over the long term, the City knows we must harden the Front Street riverbank to become more flood resilient, or it will all wash away in the coming decades. I thank the members of the Infrastructure Rebuilding and Resilience Commission for the time and attention they are devoting to this critical issue.”

The Commission held public listening sessions and site visits in Stonington, Old Orchard Beach, Saco, Rumford, Mexico, Jay, Rockland, Machias, and Caribou, in addition to several virtual meetings. The interim report reflects what the Commission heard during its first six months of work as needed improvements:

- Bolstering Maine’s critical infrastructure that supports reliable and affordable electricity, heat, transportation, and drinking water
- Helping communities to reduce risk and rebuild faster after disasters, including areas such as working waterfronts that support Maine’s critical industries
- Bridging disaster data and communications gaps among state and local officials
- Streamlining permitting to rebuild infrastructure, especially for smaller communities
- Building capacity at the local, state, and regional levels, including increasing the supply of construction workers and engineers to prepare for and rebuild after extreme weather events
- Examining how to fund the scale of infrastructure resilience needs in Maine, which is beyond the ability of local communities or the state government to meet alone

Following the release of the interim report at Hallowell City Hall, local business owner Rich Friscia provided a tour of his building at 140 Water Street in Hallowell. The historic building, which houses a coffee shop, gift shop, and apartments, was lifted from its foundation in the December 2023 flood. An award from the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development’s Business Recovery and Resilience Fund is now funding needed repairs, including replacement of floor joists, mold remediation, foundation strapping, basement flood vent installation, sump pumps, and sloped drainage to allow water to recede more easily during future floods.

“We want to express our immense gratitude to the exhausting hard work of many people that stepped in to complete repairs, problem solve, and work together to pull off almost the impossible,” **said Rich Friscia**. “The resiliency grant from the state will allow us to better secure the building through measures that will help to prevent this type of damage in the future.”

“What the data has projected and what these storms clearly showed is that we are all thinking differently about how we rebuild in preparation for the future,” **said Heather Johnson, Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development and a Commission member**. “Our team looks forward to supporting organizations as they shore up their assets and protect infrastructure from future storms.”

The full Commission convened in Augusta following the announcement for its regular meeting. It will now build on the interim report to deliver the state’s first long-term infrastructure resilience plan in May 2025.

According to a recent [study](#) released by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, every \$1 spent on climate resilience and preparedness saves communities \$13 in damages, cleanup costs, and economic impact.

The Mills Administration and the Legislature have already taken significant action to strengthen Maine’s response to extreme weather, committing \$60 million in storm relief for working waterfronts, infrastructure projects, and business recovery. This relief -- the single largest investment in storm recovery by any Administration in Maine history -- flowed to Maine communities through the Working Waterfront Resilience Grant Program, Maine Infrastructure Adaptation Fund, and Business Recovery and Resilience Fund. So far, this funding has enabled [repair and recovery investments](#) in 43 towns and cities, nearly 70 working waterfront facilities, and over 100 businesses and nonprofits.

Accelerating this investment is a \$69 million federal grant [announced](#) by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in July. With this funding, multiple state agencies and partners will work with communities to take strong, pragmatic steps to address vulnerabilities, protect people, and ensure critical infrastructure is prepared for future impacts.

The NOAA funding includes \$9 million for the state’s Community Resilience Partnership grant program, which helps communities become resilient to the effects of climate change and to reduce fossil fuel use and carbon emissions. Communities may enroll in the Partnership at any time and grant applications for the current round will be accepted until December 17. For more information on how to enroll in the Partnership, visit the [Partnership’s website](#).

For more information about the Commission, [please visit its website](#).

The Commission’s interim report is available [HERE](#).

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