

Recovery, Resiliency, and the Future of Montpelier

Digging Into Ideas for Action - Notes and Priorities

August 22, 2023

1. Emergency Planning & Warning System

What's Happening in this Arena now?

What emergency planning systems are in place now, or should be, to prepare for possible scenarios in the future? Are warning systems adequate? Are there other community approaches to emergencies that could inform Montpelier as we look to the future? Effective emergency planning will only become more important as climate threats continue to evolve.

- Notification systems
 - VT Alert – multiple ways to be notified.
 - Text alerts on road conditions were helpful.
 - Some notification systems tell you what the event is but don't tell you what to do.
 - Got alert on Monday at 11 that it was going to be bad – this was too late.
 - School system has robust notification system for delays/cancellations.
 - Roger Hill – forecasting weather events so utilities can prepare.
 - Evident 5 days before that storm was brewing. 2 days before – clear it would be catastrophic.
 - Governor referenced on Monday that the state knew about this on Friday. Surprise that there was no deployment of resources beforehand.
 - Failure of city and state administration compared to what is happening in CA this week.
 - VT storm resulted in immense damage – cars and inventory lost, whereas in CA people were sandbagging, preparing their homes.
 - Every time there are thunderstorms, we get notifications about flash floods but this was different.
- Knowledge and identification of emergency response centers
 - Doesn't work if site you pick is flooded/inaccessible.
 - Strong volunteer network and community spirit – mobilization of the Hub.
 - Some folks from homelessness task force visited people who live along the river.
 - Capital Area Neighborhoods (CAN) was set up during '09 financial crisis - concerned about seniors, etc. – but there was a lack of leadership and funding here.
 - 25-26 neighborhoods were organized with 12-13 captains throughout the city of Montpelier.
 - Budget went towards coordinator – likely grant funded.
 - Neighbors checked in on each other and came up with hyper local preparedness plans (like can I sleep in your apt. if mine is on the ground floor?).
- Mobilization of state resources
 - National Guard – unclear where they were and how/if they should have been mobilized.
 - Swift water rescue team was in Montpelier on Sunday.
 - Unclear who is responsible for what aspects of emergency preparedness/notification systems.
 - City has several robust emergency management plans.
 - Lots of flood/river corridor resources available online.
 - There is a Hazard Mitigation Plan – 115 pages.
 - These are available in planning office too.
 - Questions around how well these work, and how they can be better used.

What are some potential ideas for short or long-term action?

- We need to be prepared for broad spectrum of emergencies
 - All hazards alert (snow, flood, fire, extreme heat).
 - Updating evacuation plan and emergency shelter locations.
 - Library and city hall are closed right now.
 - Evacuation plan if neighborhoods are islanded.

- o Identifying evacuation routes.
- o Adequate warning and notification of disaster events so people can help each other and businesses.
- o Coordinate and mobilize volunteer response ahead of time – can connect this to City government (example parks dept. mobilizing right now) and to CAN coordinators.
- o Using types of notifications systems already in place – meals on wheels, school delays/cancellations.
- o Folks would rather be safe than sorry.
- o Splash seemed to get their inventory out of there ahead of time – can we learn from this?
- Can we have dedicated water rescue teams (state has these, just not specific to Montpelier – coordinate volunteers with boats?)
- o On the flip side, we need information after a disaster about when it is safe to return. We need to strengthen post disaster communication systems (specifically hard for renters to find this out) – again CAN or a neighborhood network could be helpful here.
- Accessibility of info and notifications
 - o More specific instructions for what action to take for what emergency – so resources/info are ready to go before an event strikes – geo-targeted.
 - o Communication mechanisms to reach all Montpelier residents and businesses.
 - o Non-online resources, specific to Montpelier residents (city plans, preparedness, what to do in X disaster) – waterproof!
 - o Group of volunteers who go door to door – to check with elderly, homebound or unhoused people.
 - o A warning siren would be good in flood or fire.
 - o Encourage and educate people on how to sign up for VT Alert – where you can choose phone call or other notification.
 - o Send these out with water bills, put in all mailboxes (thinking about tenants).
- Coordination with local radio stations
 - o More frequent communications so preparedness is front of mind and it becomes a habit and folks aren't stranded wondering what to do.
 - o Populations we are concerned about – identify who and where they are.
 - o Older residents – 42% of population.
 - o People experiencing homelessness.
- People with disabilities – coordinate with VCIL, DAIL.
 - o Dedicating resources to a volunteer network with professional support, training, finances.
 - o Reviving/evolving CAN.
 - o Build off of flood volunteer response from this flood.
- Overarching theme of needing to educate, practice, and get more connected to bring everyone along.

Priority ideas for potential action:

- Mobilize volunteer network ahead of time and connect with existing orgs (City, Montpelier Parks, Meals on Wheels, schools, medical center).
 - o Exercise more caution – get folks in the habit of preparing for disasters so they are ready no matter the outcome.
- Accessibility of preparedness information and disaster notifications.
 - o Accessing seniors, folks with disabilities, unhoused folks, tenants.
 - o Include more geotargeted info in alerts with more specific information about what action people need to take.
 - o Broad notification systems for different types of events – siren, local radio, mobilizing volunteer network for in person comms.
 - o Encourage and educate on how to sign up for VT-Alert regularly (send out in water bill, posters, dropped in mailboxes).
 - o Make City plans more broadly known and available.
- Establishing a volunteer group or network for preparedness and disaster deployment that is backed by professional support, training, and has a budget, potentially with a paid coordinator position.
 - o Reviving and evolving Capital Area Neighborhoods.
 - o Building off of volunteer response from this flood.

- o This group can support the city with the two ideas above and help craft and create systems so it is clear who is doing what in disaster events.

2. Food System and Food Security

What's Happening in this Arena now?

- No security for farmers, no back up, no veggies stored, things rotting in the ground.
- Farmers feel vulnerable, unstable.
- There is a land use conflict between using the arable river land for farms, versus the call for expanded riparian buffers and wetlands.
- We need data and metrics to figure out how much we get locally, and how much we import.
- We have experienced a broken food supply chain before – we should have storage and back up for emergencies.
- Right now, churches are starting a conversation about sharing kitchen space in Montpelier.
- Community Harvest of Vermont is doing more now than before.
- We need to keep thinking about how to serve the most vulnerable of us – seniors, very low income, disabled.
- We also need to connect with new farmers, particularly indigenous or BIPOC, learn their needs and ways to support their operations.
- We don't know where people are eating right now, with the churches not having kitchens. We would feed between 50-80 people some evenings, a full sit-down dinner.
- Food assistance programs like Farm to Family, EBT capabilities at farmers markets, GUSNIP, and others are worthwhile.
- We need to think about things like apprenticeships, supporting farmers in the long term.
- We need to think about regional resilience.
- There is no “normal” in agriculture anymore.

What are some potential ideas for short or long-term action?

SHORT TERM:

- We need to stand up and support philanthropic programs that support farms in times of emergency, such as NOFA's Emergency Farmer Fund, CAE's no-interest revolving loan Farm Fund, and VCF's Flood Response and Recovery Fund.
- We need to put a Montpelier liaison on Farm to Plate groups, so we can incorporate their data, metrics, and their goals into our CITY plans.
- We need to support, celebrate and provide recognition to the dozens of volunteers.
- The FEAST Program has been great, but it was seriously impacted. We need to support it in the short term with more funding, and in the longer term to find a permanent home for FEAST – maybe our own land somewhere, like a city farm.
 - o Tennis courts or other suggestions for land.
- We need to strengthen our relationships with farmers and suppliers, and provide incentives for new and beginning farmers to come to Vermont. Farmers are retiring and aging out, and we need to connect with new farmers.
- Right now, the focus is on business people and getting them low interest loans and grants. Farmers are left out – only 1 out of 20 million for BEGAP for example. This is unfair, but it's because we don't have awareness of what's going on with farmers. WE need a public media campaign – radio, print, Front Porch Forum – to tell their stories and how vulnerable they are too – and how hard it will be for them to come back online.
- We need a small dedicated volunteer labor force, like groups of 4 for each farm, to go and help rebuild but to be there over time – for years to come.
- Centralize/coordinate the charitable meals systems in Montpelier.
- Make sure that we include Another Way Community Center in the discussions – this organization does all kinds of support from food and shelter to mental and physical health, but hasn't been on the radar.

LONG TERM:

- Readjusting the Ag Budget for the state- specifically allocate more to diversified and small-scale community farms. It's time to move away from supporting fossil fuel heavy dairy farms, and reduce their funding to support food security and resilience for us locally.
- FEAST farm – find a permanent site, explore the golf course, tennis courts, other locations.
- Build Food Forests and edible landscapes.

- Build a shared facility for storage, processing, distribution and more. Farmers can store surplus, but also we can use it as an emergency food hub. We can go back to the Community Center plans that the city has, and see if we can build this into those plans.
- Our state needs to incentivize alternative agricultural production, like vertical ag, hydroponic ag, and urban ag across the state.
 - The Home Farm Way property is still available, not owned by the city, and could be a location for something in the future.

Priority ideas for potential action:

- Montpelier liaison to Farm to Plate to incorporate into local planning efforts.
- Support FEAST program in the short and long term.
- Create public media campaign to raise awareness of farm and food system vulnerabilities and long term sustainability.
- Start a grassroots campaign to change the state's ag budget with a focus on community based and diversified operations and away from dairy.

3. Leadership for Recovery & Resilience

What's Happening in this Arena now?

What kind of leadership will we need for today and toward a resilient future? Do we need a new structure? An ongoing think-tank? A recovery and resilience czar? How do we work effectively together as a community and what leadership will unite the diverse flood response efforts and build resilience in the face of challenges in the future? What has leadership looked like in response to the flood? (15 minutes).

- Yay for Montpelier Alive - witnessing how quickly leadership came together; Hundreds of volunteers over a couple days.
- Yay for Parks Department, e.g. putting up Montpelier Alive signs and skillfully delegating.
- Montpelier Alive already had communication open to all the businesses, e.g. email list, Facebook group, weekly meetings since the flood.
- Front Porch Forum was a key means of communication.
- Social media was a support - from Montpelier Alive, the city, business owners and residents.
- Mutual aid chat thread blew up which is how it's supposed to work, e.g. of residents needing help and need was able to be communicated quickly and then responded to; depends on people trusting one another.
- Response time was phenomenal.
- Shout-out to Dominoe's which gave deep discounts.
- Things may not have worked as well for people who can't move as quickly, e.g. people who use walkers, about to have a baby.
- There was "Magic" in the community coming together.
- There isn't one organization that owns the responsibility of coordinating the answers to recovery and resilience.
- Institutions offering leadership within their own "lane," e.g. Banks offering low-interest loans to help people recovering.
- Individuals and groups interested in supporting people in coming together for celebration and leisure and honoring grief, e.g. altar on Langdon Street.
- There was a gap around safety alerts, for example, the neighborhood at Elm and Spring was in a slight panic not knowing whether to evacuate – no one knowing who has the information and where can you get it.
- Gaps - homebound individuals; low-income; isolated areas.
- We used to have CAN - Capital Area Neighborhoods.
- Communications tools are great except they require devices or computers.

What are some potential ideas for short or long-term action?

- We need a single entity that can operate outside of bureaucracy and help direct people to the services they need in a centralized manner.
- The City Manager pre-deployed Parks Department. VT Alerts are by phone, text or email. City has to communicate with a state department to receive supplies. This was all coordinated.
- City had to wait for FEMA to arrive to be able to share information with residents.

- Important to retain what we've learned.
- Colossal Inclusion is important. Unhoused. We need to be cognizant of everyone from property owners to the someone living on the streets.
- "Moving forward" leadership team and a second one addressing the needs now.
- Organizing around our neighborhoods.
- The Montpelier Downtown Community Association was established in 1996 was the precursor for Montpelier Alive.
- In Waterbury, they established an organization called Rebuild Waterbury.
- Different forms of leadership have emerged in Vermont in the wake of the flood.
- After action reports - Yes the city does them. 2011 was nothing like this. City will have a meeting tomorrow. Flood hazard regulations came out of 1992 flood. Those buildings did better.
- What can we draw upon from previous floods to go forward now.
- Capstone Community Action building was built to be in the flood plain and survived this flood well.
- There are many relevant federal resources.
- Structural changes can be made within existing structures to build in resiliency, e.g. a historic commission that requires two members to be experts on sea level rise.
- We need regional collaboration around flood resiliency.
- Recovery committees are emerging in other cities in the county - all recovery is local and committees are forming in Waterbury, Barre, etc.
- Some FEMA resources are also contingent upon specific structures in place.
- Big picture dreaming – first we need to have vision and then money.
- Have a community conversation about our shared values in the community.
- Leadership gap is in holding more community meetings and engagement; Does the city have a communications coordinator or press officer?
- Collect wisdom about where the resources are. The Hub in Waterbury worked because of the systems and structures.
- A study group could be established to collect information about resources especially federal programs and finances.
- It's unfair to ask the city government to shoulder all the recovery efforts.
- How about Montpelier Alive & the Montpelier Foundation?
- We still don't understand what happened. We need a report of what and why the flood happened. We as a community need to know why and how this flood happened. We need it on the record.
- We need to think outside the box whether our form of government is the right structure.
- Rethink the city government to be more representative through charter reform.
- Characteristics of resilient leadership entail networks, inclusion, etc.
- Leadership is a chorus not a solo act.
- How do we get a truly shared vision?
- We need to also think about who's not here and why - how to make these kinds of forums more accessible and inclusive.
- Working class folks tend to be excluded.
- It's not my generation's fault that these floods will continue and that's kind of annoying. We should build more like the city center and transit center.
- We need attention from people with resources.
- Recovery leadership needs community support.
- Future-focused leadership needs professional support.
- Continue to support existing networks of support and also bring in someone to be a "resiliency czar" with support.
- Concern about building back more expensive and not sustainable for younger generations - incorporate this into values.
- What's something we can do right now to bolster collaboration and communication? Can we find someone to root all this information in a permanent place?
- Leadership for now for recovery; Leadership needed for future resilience; All leadership must be based in our collective values.
- An organization that is focused on all the ways people communicate.
- We need a collaborative leadership dynamic with city government rather than adversarial.
- It's important that it's not a city government responsibility; hire someone to do fundraising; there is an example from Waterbury which planned a process to rebuild 115 homes after Tropical Storm Irene in 2011; a 2-3 year endeavor.
- We could build a post-disaster-oriented version of CAN; envisioned from the ground up; emphasize shared values.

- Affirmation of strong community; need to build more inclusive community.
- Longer term there will be other issues, e.g. Maui which was prepared for coastal flooding but not fires.
- We need accountable leadership.

Priority ideas for potential action:

- Two track of leadership: Hub of leadership to investigate and share resources for short-term (2-3 year) recovery and Long term resiliency for Montpelier.
- Build Colossal inclusion.
- Foster and empower existing networks of mutual aid and connection.
- Coordinated communication hub.

4. Supporting Public Health and Well Being

What's Happening in this Arena now?

Initial Framing - what does wellness mean:

- Mental Health.
- Everyone has a safe place to live.
- Issues associated with aging in place.
- Clean water and accessible food.
- Environmental health: healthy homes, air, water, mold, pollution.
- Physical Well-Being – mobility, pain management.
- Integrating physical, mental, spiritual health.
- Links between biological – physical – environmental.
- Collective and shared Joy.
- Creating attributes within our community that promote and sustain well-being.

One Thing that's happening now....what's going well?

- Position for Mental Health Interventionist (but position is unfilled) – opportunity to support impacted individuals. \$24k in funding recently requested to help hire the position.
- Mutual aid, both formal and informal. Tent at Montpelier live as an example to help each other.
- Sharing contact information, getting more connected and closer to neighbors.
- Some low-income income housing was not impacted.
- Attempt to feed the entire community.
- Continuation of community events and opportunity to connect. Montpelier Alive/Farmers Market.
- Congressmember Balint is engaged/listening to needs.
- Business owner has had challenges with infectious/dangerous waste disposal....
- Community pulling together, donating time/money.
- Montpelier Alive.
- We are becoming more of a family, and the crisis exposed problems...but built more communication and togetherness.
- We're working together, sharing, providing food, dehumidifies, shovels.
- Churches: providing community lunches and warming shelters.
- Schools are able to open on time to provide consistency for families and especially young people.
- Green-up is coming to Montpelier.
- The night of the rain, Good Samaritan/Another Way identified Vermonters experiencing homelessness and camping notified to move.
- Community reaction/connection building: curbing the mental health challenges the crisis brings helps with human resiliency.
- Residents in the disability community are supporting each other and finding way to resources meeting needs.
- City is convening meetings like this.
- A lot of resources coming to one table.
- Public safety – law enforcement and Washington County Department of Mental Health have a good working relationship to meet needs/respond. When police show up, so do other types of first responders equipped to help with mental health/substance misuse.

- Turning Point Center.
- Food Pantry served several hundred people (with Rainbow Bridge)...volunteers operating like a well-oiled machine to meet needs. Pantry is providing food, but is also a “third space” for people to connect.
- Sunrise House: peer supported mental health.
- Community connection – example of people opening houses for people to shower.
- Pressure washing of streets to address silt.
- People from different walks of life who don’t know each other, and a wide array of challenges, has created a sense of love and compassion...empathy.
- Celebration of art and natural beauty; we can celebrate as a way to bring people together.
- Rainbow Bridge in Barre: connecting volunteers for meeting needs, and a hub for LBGTQ+ community.
- Youth have responded in the physical response and the first public meeting.

What are some potential ideas for short or long-term action?

- Protocols for re-opening and resumption of Health Inspections.
- Prioritize getting efforts like Green-Up to address silt remediation.
- Toxic silt dirt remediation.
- Coordination to bring resources to disabled.
- Ensure youth are engaged and brought to the table.
- State legislature make mental health a priority.
- Moving from a rental town, to a homeownership. Policies like eviction moratorium, rental registry.
- We need a lot more housing: accessible and affordable...housing for wide spectrum of people.
- Activation of sites that have potential, and consideration of sites that continue to flood.
- Solidify the volunteer/mutual aid networks and make them sustainable – means of communication, cover more needs than urgent/emergency. This is currently also being done digitally, could it be done in a physical space.
- Suicide prevention resources that take new approaches.
- Priorities Roundtable: Make community healthy, safe, and viable by increased health protocols/how to deal with.
- Clean and dry home for everyone by October.
- Nimby-Proof small homes that can be quickly placed.
- Move High School.
- Neighborhood CAN Meetings.
- Moving toward homeownership society through taxation of landlords.
- More bus service.
- Less dependency on digital access to public facility.
- Develop the Hills (Hubbard Park) and de-develop along the river.
- Support schools to be well-resourced to meet needs.
- Library series where people are able to connect and share, be seen and heard.
- Montpelier Foundation: pay for air-testing and remediation of mold/toxic silt.
- Safe and adequately supported housing – including rental control.
- Opportunities for Home Sharing approach in Montpelier.
- Ombudsman service or technical assistance for accessing complicated recovery/assistance.
- Vibrant Montpelier Tenants Union.
- More “third spaces” for people to connect, feel a sense of community, trauma informed design.
- Access to free attorney/legal support/financial consultants to help navigate complicated issues.
- Access for all: sign language, screen-reader responsive, many languages, nothing for us without us.
- Connecting to other regional/neighboring communities.
- Expansion and continuation of support of Vermonters experiencing homelessness.
- Housing referral system.
- Public meetings: Language assessment, childcare at all meetings, and culturally competent opportunities to participate.
- Sage smudging with singing and music.
- Housing: Act 250, more of it, ensure funders are rallying around community.

Priority ideas for potential action:

- Housing

- o Short Term: Nimble and quick: Home share approach.
- o Long Term: More of it in the right places, that meets wide spectrum of accessibility needs.
- Mental Health
 - o Short-Term: Recognition, education, services.
 - o Long-Term: Third Spaces.
- De-toxification
 - o Short-term: Cleaning, testing, awareness, communication.
 - o Long-Term: Set clear goals about end expectations of what remediation work is done.

5. Financial Recovery and Resilience

What's Happening in this Arena now?

- FEMA is for residents or SBA biz at 4-8%.
- \$4k for pos pie as a grant quickly offered \$20k from state application is hard and picky, lots of denials.
- 126 Main owner: Yankee wine: BGAP from state. The state wants estimates in the app but we don't know so we have to ballpark. 20 days. No feedback.
- Grant writing assistance.
- IRA - money that is available but no place to land. Legislature needs to study.
- VEDA can act as de facto green bank.
- Skeptical of engaging FEMA: there are immediate resources for individuals. Wash county now qualifies for FEMA direct housing assistance: long term rehousing.
- Vermont recovery fund: discussion of setting up local committees. Helping folks years from now, long term resilience resources.
- Short term business support is critical, debt repayment plan.
- Business advocacy to the feds - they are meeting with rebecca ramos etc.
- Individual group advocacy.
- Individual support is seriously lacking. FEMA doesn't cover moving things up from basement, if you have flood insurance FEMA doesn't support.
- Realtor association will provide individuals \$500.
- Monthly mortgage expenses, rental costs due, \$2000.
- Chronic underfunding of capital city - more state support for cap city.
- Historically it has shouldered the burden.
- Ask community foundation to put out an RFP to create solutions for rebuilding.
- Efficiency VT for heating sources and appliances - \$10m fund for greener appliances.
- 1:1 financial counseling.

What are some potential ideas for short or long-term action?

- Must identify need.
- Create a task force to identify individuals (business?) need.
- Advocate to Federal delegation.
- Bond emergency fund?
- Mike: impact of taking out more debt \$2.3 billion cash on hand.
- We MUST define the full unmet need.
- Watson: there will likely be a special session for impeachment and the possibility of doing flood relief work.
- Look at existing municipal funds to reprioritize their use (ARPA).
- Set up a small group to canvas, go door to door, collect data, identify the need.
- State "Individual need and family needs task force".
- Long term development for commercial and residential, we had needs before the flood, opportunity Need a vehicle for organizational and structural supports from state for city and region.
- Third phase needs a development authority that can build and borrow.
- Need to further district heat plan, there is a scoping study to identify project cost, feasibility.
- Invest in retirement accounts to our local community.
- Watson: She has introduced legislation create a superfund to hold big oil accountable.

- Philanthropy is important part of the puzzle.

Priority ideas for potential action

- Quantify recovery (immediate) and resiliency (long term) costs to identify need.
- Advocate for state/fed assistance; AND identify and reprioritize existing funds.

6. River Corridor & Downtown Flooding

What's Happening in this Arena now

- Understand the data –
 - What should we expect from the future with rainfall and climate change.
 - Where are our floodplains and what does that mean for flooding.
 - What are other models from wet areas that we could learn from, e.g. Netherlands.
- Look into natural options related to giving the river more room to move; slow the water coming down out of the mountains.
- Taking a regional approach in looking at the watershed.
- Engineering options related to removing or adding dams.
- Economic incentives: Consider how to fund the actions we need to take – which will take short term and long term planning.

Climate & Rainfall

- What can we expect in the future for flooding? Dupigny-Giroux noted that it isn't just the amount of rain that falls, but how wet or dry it was before the event, it also matters where the rain falls. Perfect storm for Montpelier in this last event.
- Climate projections tell us that we cannot stop flooding problems.
- Natural Solutions.
- Removal of old dams needs to be evaluated and we need more room for the river to move and fill.
- Floodplains are important for communities, protecting their functions and space is essential. In the city, it's hard to build more capacity, but can find specific areas to improve retention.
- Need to work across disciplines, for example what we plant, how impervious our surfaces are, etc.
- Need to increase permeability of all the riparian areas.
- This is a multi-faceted problem that does not just concern Montpelier – it's a dynamic river, going through multiple towns. We need to slow the river down; create more wetlands. Rivers used to look and act much differently than they do today; we need beavers/natural solutions to have a dynamic wetland-floodplain complex to store and slow water.
- Are we mapping the area for floodplains – where are they? If there are buildings in these critical areas, can we look to solutions with those property owners? Do we have a map of where the most vulnerable areas are and the most strategic areas for solutions.
- USACE dredging for the Wrightsville has left a lot of mess behind, but there is a lot of land above and below the dam that could store more water.
- We need to slow the water, not speed it up. It is critical that we find those areas, from our forests to our floodplains, to store and slow floodwaters. Examples across the state show the efficacy of our in-tact floodplains and river corridors.
- Develop land use policies to protect and restore our floodplains.
- Using our functioning floodplains to allow for minor, natural flooding in shallow areas before the water makes it all downstream into our counties. Need to identify bermed areas that are channelizing our rivers – like our railroads.
- Need to look up the hills before the water even hits the river.
- Need to discuss the full Winooski basin.
- Flooding on the North Branch caused by the Winooski, as the latter rises so high, the North Branch can't empty into the Winooski. The North Branch then can only go onto Elm and Main when it backs up. In order to reduce flood levels in Montpelier, need to work up-watershed in the Winooski basin.
- Natural, native plants and trees have created a sponge for the excess water. Need to look at vegetation in and around our floodplains. We need to have healthy soils.
- Increasing riparian habitat both upstream but also in downtown Montpelier. There is a choke point at the North Branch and Winooski River confluence – how much can upstream habitat help if nothing is done about this choke point? Is there any flood-mitigation benefit to a bottom-released dam.

- This storm created 74 landslides across the State. How do we slow the streams? What vegetation do we need to assist with this.
- The river is not our adversary; our valley was created by the river, our farms and food have been supported by it. We need to think creatively about how we live and work with the river. How incredible is it that we have water while the rest of the world is burning/on fire.
- We are only going to get wetter; it doesn't matter how many different ways we try to mitigate it. We live in the valley, it's always going to flood. The long-term solution is how to live with repeated flood damage. How do we maintain the business district in the same place, and figure out sustainable ways to live with it.
- Need to look to the full watershed for solutions. This is not just a Montpelier problem – it's a regional problem. We need to work with our watershed.

Engineering

- Old dams and dams' uses need to be evaluated (e.g. Wrightsville – one-third is used for recreation currently).
- Is dredging a positive, or can we build up walls along the North Branch.
- Speed of water requires catchment (i.e. Wrightsville).
- Water comes up in the back parking lot of Positive Pie and Julios; in this flood, Sarduccis and Barr Hill were fine. Can a tube be built to move the water through town and not let it get out?
- Can we let water out of the dam in advance of known precipitation forecasts?
- Can we direct water under the road instead of over the road.
- We've historically dredged, walled-off, straightened our rivers, causing these issues. VT River Conservancy is looking to remove four dams in the area.
- Can we create catchment ponds to hold the water back?
- I like the idea of floodplain improvement, but what about short-term, immediate solutions? What if we lowered State Street to allow the water to spread out?
- Need to think about impervious surfaces – where are they and which can we get rid of.
- Do we need to do that through zoning, laws, or incentives.
- People trying to engineer out of a solution. Rivers need to meander and have the space to do it.
- Engineering our way to work with the river or engineer the way around/out of the river.

Other Models

- Look to the Dutch for solutions.
- We need to look to the Dutch – giving land back to the water as they know they cannot keep the water out.
- Need to learn to live with the floods, and it will be a big, long-term change that requires shifts in our land use policies and mindsets. This program in the Netherlands is called “Room for Rivers”. The main goal of the program is to manage higher waters in the rivers by lowering floodplains, and more. Recommend reviewing the webpage.

Expertise

- How will the resource experts get together to come up with a comprehensive suite of solutions to plan for our future.
- We need to get organized quickly, with leadership in the community to work with state and federal government to move forward solutions (cross-jurisdictional).
- We need to invest in relationships with the agencies (like USACE), as they have the resources.
- Planning, Financing & Incentives.
- Interest in long-range planning. All of these good ideas are going to cost something, and we need to figure out a way to sell what it is that we're doing before, during and after what we do. Vermont is good at selling ski, biking, inviting tourism into the State. While we work to recover, we need to think how we are going to package it, document the.
- process right now. The New York City Highline was a built resource and the City turned the problem into an economic solution. So, while we look to nature as part of the solution, let's also consider the economics so we can pay for that work.
- Can we incentivize farmers to allow their land to flood?
- How do we collate all of the available data to help inform the long-term planning processes?

Priority ideas for potential action:

- Slow the river down; Wetlands, plantings, buyouts, removing concrete and being strategic about the most impactful short-term and long-term options.
- Suggested focus for a future meeting: What are the top five (primarily natural) strategies in the short term (within a year) to prevent future flooding.

- o Tear up the parking lot behind Capitol Plaza and make it a park with trees to absorb the water. Shift the parking garage behind the now-empty federal building.
- o Leave the Dog River fields and HS fields as floodplain.
- o Lower State Street by X feet to draw the water away from the buildings and create a channel for future flooding.
- o Draw down the level of Wrightsville Reservoir pre-storm to leave more room for the water to rise.
- What are the top five longer-term strategies (within five years) to prevent future flooding.
 - o Buy out X properties upstream on the North Branch to allow the river to move.
 - o Remove X dams on the Winooski to lower the water level and help prevent back up on the North Branch.
 - o Create financial incentives for farmers or others with land to keep it open as floodplain in strategic areas on the North Branch.

7. Supporting Downtown

What's Happening in this Arena now?

Businesses, residents, property owners, public spaces are impacted – events are not happening - how do we adapt and reimagine our downtown? We will see different pace of business openings.

- Thank you to Montpelier Alive for developing the hub and organizing flood support to community and to support any business, businesses up on green during farmers market.
- Try to shop in the downtown.
- Great vehicle for letting us know what's open.
- Try to help in planning, have assessments going.
- Businesses are helping each other in interesting ways - the Drawing Board is planning to hire Annabel from Capital Copy and open something like Capital Copy but under the Drawing Board space - The Front is still working with other arts orgs around to coordinate show openings, co-advertise - Not cutthroat model, helpful to be open to new ideas.
- Conversations between five churches providing community lunch to see if there's a space they could share, perhaps with food pantry, for a shared kitchen.
- Collaborations: popups in bigger spaces such as Barr Hill, split the cost, for event opportunities.
- Resources that state emergency board identified for helping residents with appliance heating needs - as well as some businesses - details will be announced Tuesday after Labor Day from Efficiency VT.
- Montpelier Strong Fund: 1.6 M so far.
- Advocacy for businesses - opportunity to speak and develop partnerships.
- Assembling resources for the downtown and for businesses.
- Emergency board also approved 20M in business grants (BEGAP).

What are some potential ideas for short or long-term action

- Looking at ways to harden existing buildings: washable surfaces, metal studs, in MN some people fill their basements with clean water to match flood.
- Waterbury experience helpful:
- Enliven street as long as weather holds out to get people on the street.
- After the ice floe, the Historical Society had collection in basement - many businesses store inventory in basement, is there a way for city to get involved to create storage area for merchants at ground level somewhere else.
- Landlord assistance is hodgepodge: community organization reach out to landlords and figure out more cohesive system.
- More grants for small businesses.
- Different kinds of streetscapes - building the buildings up further, though don't know how much money that would take.
- Understanding long-term implications of floodplains ie cost of insurance and things.
- Understanding what universe of need is in terms of volunteering, etc., for recovering everyone not just some businesses.
- Short-term: more people that are downtown, more vibrant it is, many of us could be downtown to greet visitors etc.
- Let's have a flower bomb downtown - Barre did some of that downtown.
- How to make downtown appealing now? - Murals in empty storefronts? Painting picture & telling the story.

- Art is going to be important to the healing process, Irene floodgates project opened a year after Irene - put together collaborative show of people's reactions to the flood – and was part of healing process.
- In Waterbury, they hosted Octoberfest (Alchemist) to give people reasons to stroll and highlight how much people love the downtown - they sent letters to state employees they missed.
- In Dublin they have a program where you sign up to meet a Dubliner, they show you sights and tell you about it - we could do that with vouchers or something.
- Bethany church green space is wide open, would be great place for something.
- Bethany and UU church have been talking about community vigil to process grief.
- In terms of cleanup, August 26 is Greenup day, will be tables at VCFA and Hub to pick up trash etc. before upcoming tourist season.
- Plans to meet with arts council, public art commission.
- Montpelier used to celebrate mud season: wondering about tours of downtown to see what condition buildings are in.
- Empty storefronts, boards, murals - Sabrina thinking on public art project, there is going to be Langdon Street fundraiser.
- There is going to be washing of sidewalks and streets this week.
- Langdon St: flood marker on the bridge, having an official marker put up and tell story of flood would be helpful.
- Is it possible to do a community heat plan for all downtown businesses?
- Pro Pig's canoe parking marker (storytelling).
- Waterbury went through process similar to this, 9-month process, Waterbury did about half of 21-idea list, but for each project there was a bigger idea - hire downtown business promoter, that person generated ideas, etc.
- The State office complex in Waterbury was hardened, there were good ideas there.
- Project to elevate homes via FEMA.
- Contact the Army Corps of Engineers? Waterbury looked at river management, did not end up with them, but they have done projects like that.
- City council might consider when you get more activity with open liquor license on street.
- Maps with walking tours, there used to be two short books about historic buildings - what you can do in Montpelier - could do those again (interesting things around Montpelier).
- Maybe we do some kind of Oktoberfest, art installation, could get mention in press like the Boston Globe.
- Community - supported enterprise building, there are platforms for investing in small businesses.
- Many unknowns about when next storm is coming, interaction with riverine group to manage our interactions with the river - recognizing that we need to live in harmony with the rivers - we should have a study that looks at the river, the Wrightsville dam, etc., so we have concrete answers to plan for.
- Could have a series of small dams as a result of hydrological study.
- Many small solutions.
- Central VT is rich with musical talent, we could have a musical event during foliage season.
- Showcase our climate adaptation strategies via signage, examples such as clear walls to show metal studs.
- We have a commitment to downtown – it is not realistic to move it to somewhere else.
- Committed to community, but it is not viable to build business off of loans – we need to advocate to change laws so that FEMA would support businesses - it's hard to understand that this is the capital of our state when we are supporting other countries.
- Database for downtown businesses to share what they're doing: ideas for construction, materials and best practices.
- It was great to see the volunteer hub earlier, some of businesses will be figuring out how to get back for months at least - public schedule or something for orgs to reach out to businesses at different points to see what they need at different points so they don't go out of business.
- Most important tool we have is a walkable community against climate change.

Complete list of actionable ideas – short and long-term:

Long-term priorities:

- Hydrological studies at to what the river will do - 5.
- Shared storage area for businesses - 4.
- Advocating for More funding to support the downtown via GRANTS - 9.
- Building hardening and mitigation, elevation within downtown - 11.

Short-term:

- Look at funding models to help support businesses - 4.
- Staffing to support organizations like Montpelier alive, city, etc. to do this work - 8.
- Major art project - 2.
- Events - 11.
 - Oktoberfest, some kind of large scale event.
 - Program activities that get people on the street regularly, like Merchants Market at VCFA.
 - Storytelling via murals, photos, other means in the downtown.
- Shared business information-sharing resources for what they're doing.
- Investment in community through micro- investment, shopping downtown, helping visitors - 2.
- Harnessing volunteer spirit.

Priority ideas for potential action:

Short-term Priorities:

- Look at organizational structures and add hired staff and volunteers to support organizations like Montpelier Alive.
- Organizing events and promotions in the downtown.

Longer-term Priorities:

- Building hardening, elevating, mitigating and adapting in the downtown.
- Finding and advocating for more grant funding for the downtown.

ALL grounded in shared values.

8. City Infrastructure.

What's Happening in this Arena now?

Inventory and Asset Management of existing infrastructure should include:

- Soft and hard infrastructure (e.g., green stormwater infrastructure, green swales, etc.).
- Asset Class—public schools.
- Role of stormwater...much of the damage was due to stormwater this past July.
- Role of narrow river channels; restoring and rethinking river plains.
- The role of pollutants, e.g. storm and sewer.
- The role of parking lots on both sides of river/ streetways.
- Focus on the regional watershed, regional thinking.
- New recreational assets like the HiLine in NYC; elevate our infrastructure.
- “We have to go up: we have to rethink our basements!” “We throw money down the toilet otherwise.”
- Pipe District Heat up the hill.
- Make operational changes to Wrightsville Dam.
- For transportation corridors make more permeable roadways.
- “Relocation, dry-proofing, and wet-proofing”.
- Build more affordable housing.
- We need to evaluate buyouts for priority residential and commercial properties in the flood plain.
- Address high water pressure issue of city water system.
- Make the WWTF more flood resilient; making Dog River Road a levee; protecting arguably our biggest investment.
- Do we provide more flood storage, i.e., more dams?
- Rethink our river corridors—the Winooski and North Branch Rivers.

Idea Generation:

- What is the process we intend to learn by and how do we put into practice?
- Montpelier’s “Re-Envision our Downtown; Net Zero Montpelier”, circa 2015-16; why did those plans not come to fruition; please revisit.
- Good governance and key performance metrics.
- Vermont Economic Resiliency Initiative—a state document we can revisit.
- Widen the river corridor; invest in new hydroelectric turbines which currently cannot work with high water pressure.
- Relocating (up gradient and out).

- Dry-proofing and wet-proofing buildings.
- Another and ongoing hard infrastructure priority is Combined Sewer Overflow.
- Expand District Heating.

Priority ideas for potential action:

- Act to improve defenses against flooding of the wastewater treatment facility on Dog River Road.
- Improve operations and infrastructure of the Wrightsville Dam to improve flood control potential, and work with the whole upstream watershed to slow the flow of water into the reservoir.
- Improve the "green" infrastructure at and beyond the confluence of the North Branch and the Winooski to allow a higher volume of water to flow downriver.
- Re-envision downtown including revisiting old (but good) planning including the proposals that emerged from the Net-Zero Montpelier competition.
- Strengthen and improve Montpelier's governance so that it is more responsive and adaptive to the current and future (very demanding) circumstances. This includes working beyond Montpelier with neighboring communities and the state as a whole.

9. Action in the Face of Climate Change

What's Happening in this Arena now?

- Idea of developing carbon footprint calculators—I don't feel good about what I've found. I want to know my carbon footprint; I need to make changes. Try to get people to pledge changes using the carbon footprint calculator to show changes.
- We all believe climate change is a problem, but the people in charge are buying the GOP line that it's not a serious problem. It's a terribly serious problem. There's a huge # of positive feedbacks building up. Water vapor is driving half of climate change, for example. Methane has positive feedback loops, too. Montpelier could create a national or global model on how to react to climate change.
- How to build back infrastructure in a greener way.
- It's a crazy idea to move the central business district area up to the VCFA campus. Use the current downtown for river overflow. Crazier idea: Rebuild in the same place. College is welcoming Greenway Institute for Sustainable Engineering—maybe they can help.

What are some potential ideas for short or long-term action

- Get people to get rid of lawns and plant things that soak up the rain.
- Complete Streets Committee. Paint is a cheap improvement and can maybe get more people biking. People tell me they're afraid to bike, afraid of cars. E.g., State and Main. I go to head of line. The area I'm describing should be painted green, to designate a safe box. We had it on Bailey Avenue. Fog lines can also be placed to give people more confidence to ride.
- Stop talking about "climate change," which doesn't elicit a sense of emergency. Suggestions: climate degradation, climate breakdown.
- I don't think anything significant will happen to change the trajectory we're on until the fossil fuel industry is made responsible for damage they've caused here and other places. We could be an example for others if we decide to hold this industry accountable. Sen. Anne Watson has agreed to be lead sponsor of a bill to make big oil pay \$100 million a year to Vermont. Change is moved by shared values and stories and passions more than by technical arguments. If we're going to hold the industry responsible, it's going to be a good time to speak to legislators in January.
- I prefer to act in a positive way, though I think we're doomed. I'm forced to drive a car; I am not forced to use a clothes dryer, a planet-killing piece of crap. (Half a dozen people in the room say they don't own clothes dryers.) Tell people to kill their dryers.
- Montpelier and Vermont could be role models. It's about changing ourselves, not other people. Could affect the rest of the world.
- I have worked on getting my high school to go net zero. I'm on the school board, and we're working on it. City and municipal buildings could be net zero.

- We are about 50% of the way to making all city buildings net zero. My dream is how the city could support all the buildings that were flooded out of the flood zone and not run by fossil fuels. Would be a concerted effort, building by building. Assuming buildings will still be used downtown.
- In terms of carbon footprint—it's complex. Generally, in Montpelier or VT, % of fossil fuels used is for transportation and heating homes and buildings.
- One of the challenges – helping building owners get fossil fuel-free heat out of flood zone. How about extending the district heating system? I don't know engineering feasibility or costs.
- If I walked downtown to buy a bike helmet vs ordering from Amazon. Could we put together carbon impact info on that sort of activity.
- Carbon footprint calculators aren't great.
- We could come up with case studies to reduce fossil fuel use in heating and transportation without exact numbers.
- Maybe more incentives for electric cars, especially if shared with neighbors.
- There are state and federal incentives. If your vehicle was damaged by flooding, there's extra money available.
- And more charging stations in Montpelier.
- All electric heat vs. district heating. And how flood resilient is district heating piping underground?
- It's resilient. Some electronics were destroyed. We've had more interest in district heating since the flood than previously. But it's a really tough lift to attach to district heating this season if the pipe isn't already outside your business.
- How about heat pump district heat.
- Can be done; it's a completely different system.
- I'm new to the area and topic. Information and education are important. I talk to educated people all the time who don't recycle or compost. We need more people to freak out and then take wise action.
- I am curious about other places that are doing better job of this than we are—what can we do? I was an exchange student in Switzerland in 1983. They took reusable bags with recyclables; they have been hanging clothes to dry, bicycling to school. We are so far behind. If we look across the pond and pick any old city, we could get ideas.
- Does Montpelier have sister cities? Could be easier to get ideas from cities we already have relationship with.
- It's better to use incentives than requirements on individuals. For example, a resolution from the capital declaring climate emergency. We have a law in VT acknowledging that there is a climate emergency. Talk about fossil fuel disasters, not natural disasters. Hold polluters accountable. Help people access the incentives they need.
- The city puts together lobbying priorities. Could we add "climate emergency declaration" to that?
- Climate change is a multi-layered issue, with delayed impacts, so we don't see the direct effect of what we do. This is going to take system change, not just individual change. Have to look at who consumes too much or too little, how to even it out. Montpelier can't do it alone, but can be a model. How are we to address injustice, overconsumption that are part of the fundamental cause of climate change?
- If I were king of Vermont, I'd close the interstate every Sunday and let bikes ride on it. I'd shut down snowmobiles and motorboats and jet skis and stuff and figure out a way to price fossil fuels that's realistic.
- All the experts tell us we're going to have more of the storms like last month, and bigger ones, so I'm not convinced rebuilding downtown is a good idea.
- I live on Main Street and own J. Langdon on Langdon Street. When we moved here, my daughter came home with questionnaire about carbon footprint. If we used incredible minds from high school, we could do something. I'm originally from Houston, Texas, and I'm amazed by how an individual can make a difference here.
- Holding fossil fuel corporations accountable is a great idea; I know three lawyers who would love to help.
- We're rebuilding with flood-resistant vinyl.
- District heat meters are being replaced in the basement; they have to be on the pipes. Are difficult to waterproof.
- Make downtown friendly to electric vehicles, bikes and pedestrians. Don't encourage gas cars on roads. Expand public transit. My parents have tried to use public transit, but it is not viable.
- There's a train that carries people that doesn't go through town. Would be nice to have a train that carries people and comes downtown.
- The city (with state permission) could put in requirements on equipment, e.g., phasing out fossil equipment. In Burlington, they will allow new fossil heating system, but you have to calculate the lifetime social cost of carbon, and they charge you that up front, which makes it less attractive to do so.
- Montpelier should declare a climate emergency.
- We should promote non-carbon vehicles, utilities, boats; everywhere we use carbon we should transition. Paint lines on highways for bikes, and install charging stations.

- Fossil footprint mechanism.
- I'm for all of the above, except moving downtown.
- My top 3 things: a carbon footprint calculator, an emergency resolution, and a change in the language we use. These are low-hanging fruit.

Priority ideas for potential action:

The city should declare a climate emergency, which can be an outreach and education tool, and we can use that declaration to help identify some key steps the state and city should take.

- We should create a community carbon footprint assessment tool that will aim to track and help everybody participate and feel engaged in reducing our collective climate pollution; and.
- We should address VT's two biggest carbon pollution contributors -
 - o transportation -- by taking steps such as using paint on our streets to make them more bike and pedestrian friendly; increasing availability of EV chargers; looking into additional EV incentives; improving local public transit in Montpelier; and.
 - o heating buildings - by helping people rebuilding now to access and afford non-fossil fuel and efficient solutions by promoting and perhaps expanding incentives; exploring possible local regulations such as no new fossil fuel heating in new construction; exploring ways to expand district heat; and other mitigation steps forward.