

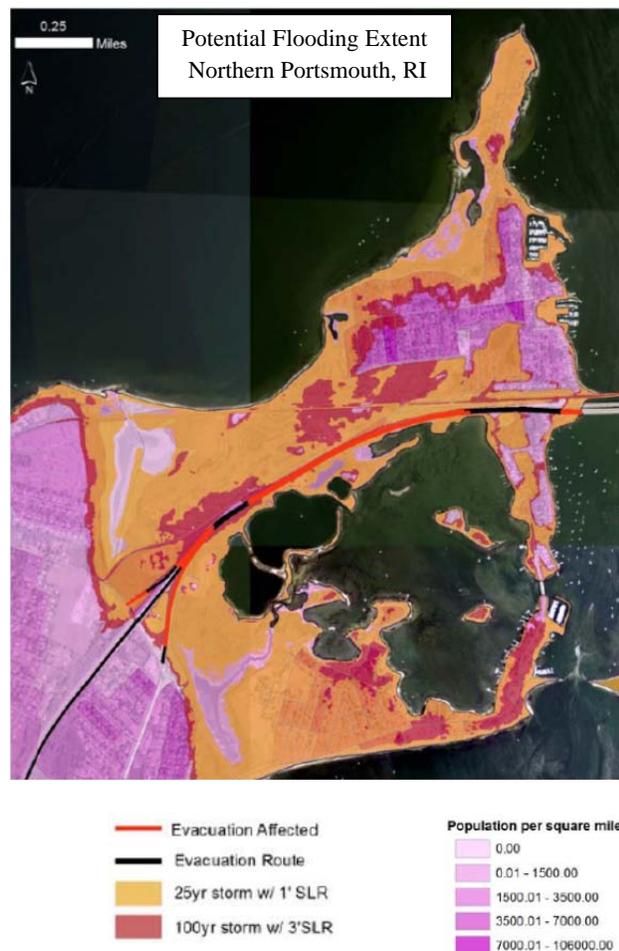
Aquidneck Island Resilience Strategy Issue Paper 1

Issue: EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND PREPAREDNESS

Description of Concern: The 2017 State of Rhode Island Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment rated high winds, severe winter weather and floods among highly likely hazards faced by communities in the state. The threat of coastal flooding is an issue that Aquidneck Island and the other 18 coastal municipalities also face. All of the aforementioned events have tested the Island’s emergency preparedness and response capabilities.

Discussions with a range of Aquidneck Island stakeholders revealed the following issues and concerns:

- 1) Aquidneck Island is uniquely vulnerable during significant wind-driven events when the bridges are closed down.
- 2) The island has a high percentage of vulnerable populations, including those dependent on either the emergency shelter, or alternative sources of refrigeration, food, heat or electricity.
- 3) Increased storm intensity along with the expanded impact of coastal flooding cause difficulties for emergency responders. Flooding or downed trees may block access routes and pose safety concerns for the community in addition to requiring costly and time-intensive removal operations.
- 4) Segments of the population are either unaware of the benefits of taking preparatory actions, or resistant to doing so. Many people are simply unaware of long term increases in the threats from coastal hazards (i.e. sea level rise).



Background:

The Aquidneck Island community benefits from regional coordination in the field of emergency preparedness and response. As an island, it faces the reality of potential isolation during a hurricane in the summer or blizzard in the winter. Of particular concern to planners, first responders and shelter managers is being able help all of the island’s population, including residents, members of the transient (tourist) population, as well as vulnerable segments of society.

Like much of the rest of the state, there are plans and resource in place which implement preparedness measures within the boundaries of each municipality. Rhode Island state law requires the establishment of an Emergency Management Agency (EMA) within each city and town. Home Rule Charters in Portsmouth, Middletown and Newport and the lack of a county level government result in the position of Emergency Management Director being a localized role and not regionally shared. In Portsmouth the role of EMA Director is kept separate from that of the fire chief in accordance with town ordinance. This is not the case in Newport and Middletown where the fire chief holds dual roles.

Apart from local and state government emergency response capability, the entire Aquidneck Island region benefits from the Aquidneck Island Emergency Volunteer Alliance (AIEVA). Led by an unfunded coordinator, AIEVA runs the shelter at Gaudet Middle School, organizes volunteers from local civic organizations and religious groups, and works directly with the three EMA’s to respond to the emergency shelter needs of island residents and visitors alike. They also organize volunteers to respond “in any way needed,” to any kind of emergency event that might occur island-wide. AIEVA benefits from the flexibility of operating outside of local government structure, however lacks administrative support staff and funding, as it is an entirely volunteer based organization.

At the State government level, Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA) works directly with the three municipalities to establish standardized policy and facilitate disaster preparedness and relief. At one time a RIEMA regional planner existed who worked directly with the EMAs on the Island, however that position was re-assigned to other roles within the state agency.

Emergency Management Assets

	Emergency Shelters*	Fire Station	Police Station	Emergency Medical Services Unit	Hospitals
Middletown	a) Joseph H. Gaudet Middle School b) Middletown High School	239 Wyatt Rd	123 Valley Rd	239 Wyatt Rd	
Newport		a) 21 West Marlborough St b) 100 Old Fort Rd	a) 45 Washington Sq b) 120 Broadway c) 1 John H. Chafee Blvd (CCRI)	a) 21 West Marlborough St b) 100 Old Fort Rd	11 Friendship St
Portsmouth	c) Thompson Middle School d) Florence Gray Center e) Pell Elementary School f) Portsmouth High School g) Portsmouth Middle School	2300 East Main Rd	a) 2270 East Main Rd b) 838 East Main Rd (State Barracks)	2300 East Main Rd	
Naval Station		1931 Peary St	1931 Peary St		43 Smith Rd (Naval Health Clinic)

***RIEMA State Shelter Plan:**

http://www.riema.ri.gov/resources/business/prepare/preparednessconference/files/Session_1_Shelter_Conference_Slides_24_Aug_2015.pdf

In addition to individual municipal preparations, and augmenting their effectiveness, are the following examples of successful island-wide coordination: 1) Mutual Aid emergency response assistance agreements under the East Bay Control Center, 2) The East Bay Heavy Rescue Squad’s coordinated response capability for unique and complex emergency scenarios.

While the emergency response community has demonstrated a willingness to collaborate and be proactive, opportunities exist for further improvement and increased efficiency, particularly in the areas of staffing and information sharing. The identity of the appropriate driving force for change and innovation, an issue inextricably tied to funding, is not clear. The question of whether emergency managers should be establishing planning priorities for the municipal governments, or if the governments

should be identifying problems and soliciting the input of the emergency response community to respond, is certainly applicable here. In any case, what typically serves as an impetus for action is a major disruptive event that highlights gaps in preparedness.

Aquidneck Island’s Vulnerable Populations

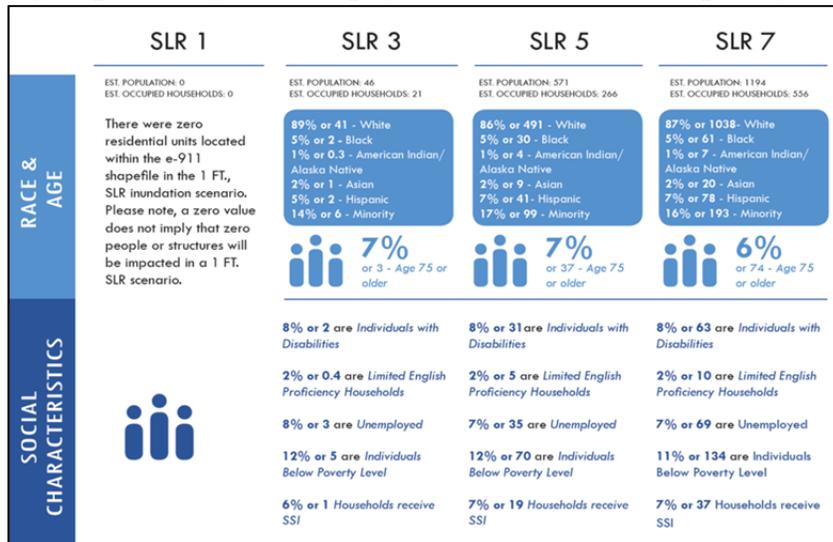
Rhode Island Statewide Planning assessed the social impact of sea level rise for each coastal municipality and for Aquidneck Island’s three municipalities combined. The project combined population data with flooding data from CRMC’s STORMTOOLS. The 2010 census data in the table below illustrates the size of vulnerable populations in the three municipalities. While census data does include a broad range of information vital to planning for emergency response, precise information on the extent of the island’s seasonal population dynamics is not available.

Municipality	Population	With a Disability	In Labor Force, Unemployed	Single Mother w/ Children (0-18 yrs old) Households	Over 65 Living Alone	Living Below Poverty Level
Middletown	16,150	1566	744	401	927	1129
Newport	24,672	2785	821	823	1352	2493
Portsmouth	17,389	2139	721	334	845	1355
Total	58,211	6490	2286	247	3124	4977

The analysis indicated that segments of the populations considered vulnerable, including individuals with disabilities, limited English proficiency, the unemployed, individuals below the poverty level and households that receive Social Security income, will likely begin to experience the effects of sea level rise as it exceeds the 1 foot mark and reaches the three foot mark.

What is not included in the analysis is a prediction of impact as storm surge is amplified by sea level rise. During acute storm events, the number of households impacted could be higher.

<http://www.planning.ri.gov/geodeinfo/data/socio-slr.php>



Current Plans and Resources

	Middletown	Portsmouth	Newport
Municipal Hazard Mitigation Plan (status)	Approved 1/16/2015–1/15/2020	Expired 5/28/09 – 5/27/14	Approved 1/5/2017–1/4/22
Website	fire.middletownri.com	http://portsmouthemergency.com/	www.cityofnewport.com/departments/fire
Radio station	WADK 1540 and WSAR 1480	WADK 1540 and WSAR 1480	WADK 1540 and WSAR 1480
Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/Middletown-Fire-Department-116156248480092/	https://www.facebook.com/PortsmouthEmergency/	https://www.facebook.com/NewportRIFireDepartment
Twitter	@Middletown411	@PortsmouthEmerg @PortsmouthPDRI	@NewportRIPolice
CodeRED*	✓	✓	✓
Other	-CRS class 8 -National Weather Service StormReady Community	Hurricane Preparedness: https://www.portsmouthri.com/DocumentCenter/View/45 National Weather Service StormReady Community	-Entering CRS program on May 1, 2017 as class 7

*CodeRED is a community notification system that provides a means for emergency managers to pass important information to a targeted audience in the event of an emergency.

Recommendations/Potential Actions:

- 1) Staffed at the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission, develop a regional Community Rating System (CRS) and Hazard Mitigation Plan coordinator position that works across municipal boundaries, assists municipal planners, shares best practices, seek collaborative opportunities, and demonstrates the value of the CRS program.
- 2) Identify trainings that focus on a municipality’s pre and post disaster activities and responsibilities. Following needs assessment, coordinate with stakeholders to request technical assistance from partner agencies including the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and RIEMA.
- 3) Coordinate between municipal public works department, EMA directors, and private businesses with either potential assistance capability (large parking lots, water/supply storage or distribution capacity) or critical island wide functions requiring priority emergency response.
- 4) Build AIEVA capacity with a funded position to assist with logistic, communications and coordination as well as assist the shelter manager.
- 5) Explore funding opportunities, including resource pooling, to support the regional emergency preparedness staff positions proposed above.
- 6) Following Portsmouth’s model, establish a separate EMA director position in Newport and Portsmouth that enables the Fire and Police Chief to more effectively focus on emergency response during major events, reduces the work load on those holding both positions simultaneously, and focuses on increasing preparedness island-wide.