Community Preparedness and Engagement

Resilience Priority #1:

Strengthen community engagement and awareness to ensure all residents, especially vulnerable populations, are informed of Town initiatives, programs, and resources in order to be supported during extreme weather events.

Actions:

1a. Outreach to Vulnerable Populations: Focus on hard-to-reach groups, including non-English speakers, isolated seniors, renters, and low-income households, through targeted outreach; coordinate with local organizations, committees, etc. where possible.

1b. Neighborhood Networks and Communication: Explore ways the Town can build and support community-based networks and develop a robust, accessible communication system that includes digital platforms (text alerts, social media) and printed materials + signage for those without digital access. This includes creating a Town of Acton NextDoor account.

1c. Volunteer Networks: Explore opportunities to establish and strengthen volunteer networks, including a community-based CERT (Community Emergency Response Team). Ensure the CERT is well-informed and familiar with rules and guidance to implement

1d. Support for Vulnerable Populations: Identify needed specialized services for residents who are elderly, have a disability, and are low-income during extreme weather events, such as emergency shelters, food access, medical resources, and transportation.

1e. Hazard Risk Signage: Identify public areas in town that are particularly vulnerable to natural hazards and consider installing signage with information, risks, and resources (e.g. identifying areas that could be at risk of flash-flooding during storms, or temporary signs identifying "cooling centers").

1f. Collaborate: Invite community members to be part of community-resilience projects from the start. Include opportunities for community feedback and suggestions for project changes during the process. Ensure that if the work is specific to the location or to benefit a particular demographic of residents, that the engagement is focused on those communities.

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Emergency Response, Communication, and Education

Resilience Priority #2:

Strengthen emergency communication systems and response to ensure community members are well-prepared and supported during extreme weather events.

Actions:

2a. Emergency Communications Network: Enhance emergency communications by using multiple sources (FM station, reverse 911, text messaging, ham radio, social media) to reach broad sectors of the population, especially those with limited access to digital resources.

2b. Education: Organize workshops, trainings, and outreach materials to educate residents on emergency preparedness, climate change impacts, and sustainable actions they can take (e.g., personal emergency plans, water saving, energy conservation, recycling).

2c. Emergency Shelters: Better equip municipal buildings (e.g., Human Services building, PSF) to serve as emergency shelters during extreme weather events and provide necessary supplies and support for vulnerable populations.

Resilience Priority #3:

Reduce flooding and enhance stormwater management to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events, particularly in flood-prone areas identified in the Hazard Mitigation Plan (2024).

Actions:

3a. Green Infrastructure: Implement green infrastructure solutions, such as rain gardens, permeable pavements, and the preservation of wetlands and natural floodplains to manage stormwater, reduce flooding risks, and mitigate droughts.

3b. Beaver Mitigation & Education: Develop strategies to address beaver-related flooding through pond levelers and beaver deceivers, ensuring wildlife management does not exacerbate flooding in more developed areas. Advocate for state funding to implement beaver deceiver solutions.

3c. Redevelopment: Explore zoning for redevelopment to integrate stormwater best management practices.

3d. Tree Management: Establish a proactive tree maintenance program, including removal, replacement, and strategic planting of trees to enhance stormwater absorption and mitigate flood risks and wildfire risks.

3e. Dams: Explore opportunities for improving the sustainable management of existing dams and develop a rank order of dams that should be removed.

3f. Continue to expand on Stormwater Management Plan: This includes advancing culvert assessments. Seek funding and grant opportunities to accelerate this effort.

Resilience Priority #4:

Enhance energy infrastructure to ensure reliable, clean energy during extreme weather events and support the transition to renewable energy sources.

Actions:

4a. Resilient Electric Grid: Advocate for greater investment by Eversource in infrastructure improvements to create a more resilient electric grid that can withstand extreme weather (ie, tree branch management before storms hit; explore underground lines for new buildings).

4b. Community Energy Storage: Identify community energy storage solutions to provide backup power during outages and support local resilience. Exolore opportunities for improving energy storage safety and addressing public safety concerns.

4c. Solar Energy Solutions: Encourage residential, commercial, and community solar installations (Eg. streamlining the process for solar installations and reach SolSmart Designation and continue to provide guidance through Clean Energy Coaching Program).

Sustainable Housing and Resilient-Focused Planning

Resilience Priority #5:

Support the development of affordable, energy-efficient, and climate-resilient housing to accommodate growth while minimizing environmental impacts.

Actions:

5a. Energy-efficient Buildings: Continue to be a leader in the implementation of the highest energy-efficient building code standards in the state and identify opportunities for making them accessible/affordable to meet the requirements and encourage sustainable housing retrofits to reduce energy consumption and increase resilience (through initiatives like Acton's Clean Energy Coaching Program).

5b. Smart Growth Planning: Prioritize sustainable, mixed-use developments that integrate affordable housing and green infrastructure, multi-transit options, and minimize climate-related risks.

5c. Affordable Housing Development: Support policies that promote affordable housing through regulations and incentives and ensure new housing developments incorporate climate resilience strategies.

5d. Address Embodied Carbon: Explore potential building code solutions to reduce the embodied carbon in new buildings (ie, using materials like wood that help sequester carbon and reducing the use of materials that emit carbon during production & use).

5e. Collaborative Planning: Work with regional and state governments to integrate climate resilience into zoning laws, building codes, transportation planning, and disaster preparedness efforts.

Resilience Priority #6:

Protect and enhance local green spaces and natural resources to support biodiversity, sustainable water management, and community well-being.

Actions:

6a. Native Tree Planting and Green Spaces: Expand programs for native tree planting, especially in public spaces that lack shading, to mitigate urban heat island effects, improve carbon sequestration, and enhance biodiversity.

6b. Biodiversity and Habitat Preservation: Promote biodiversity and other natural resource preservation efforts to absorb stormwater, provide wildlife habitats, and improve community resilience to flooding. This includes actions like setting up wildlife corridors.

6c. Tree and Infrastructure Management: Develop comprehensive strategies for tree management, including proactive maintenance around power lines and public infrastructure to prevent power outages and reduce tree-fall risks during storms.

6d. Water Quality & Quantity: In coordination with the Acton Water District (AWD) and other regionalized efforts (such as OARS), identify green infrastructure solutions and pollution management for more sustainable groundwater management; amplify water conservation messaging and tools promoted by the AWD.

6e. Community Landscaping: Seek funding to develop a landscaping plan and tups for residents and businesses in Acton to more sustainability manage green spaces.

Resilience Priority #7:

Promote sustainable and resilient transportation options to reduce carbon emissions and enhance mobility during extreme weather events.

Actions:

7a: Expand Sustainable Transportation & Encourage Mass Transit: In line with the Climate Action Plan Mobility Strategies, develop more bike lanes, pedestrian-friendly streets, and improve access to public transportation to reduce reliance on cars and enhance mobility for all residents during extreme weather events.

7b: Sustainable Transportation Systems: In line with the Climate Action Plan Mobility Strategies, accelerate the electrification of vehicles and public transportation. This includes increasing the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) by encouraging the purchase of EVs and filling EV charger infrastructure gaps near major throughways and key locations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to fuel disruptions during extreme weather.