

Island County

Multi-Jurisdiction Hazard Mitigation Plan

Section Two

PLANNING PROCESS

Introduction

This section of the Island County Multi-jurisdiction Hazard Mitigation Plan describes the planning process as implemented by Island County.

Mitigation Planning Group

The Island County Mitigation Planning Group is composed of representatives of the Island County Department of Emergency Management (DEM) Island County Department of Planning and Community Development, Department of Public Works, officials of Langley and Oak Harbor, and representatives from separate Island County jurisdictions and organizations. Inclusion of Island County residents is a primary goal of this effort. A list of activities that provided public access to this planning process is included at Appendix A.

The Planning Process

The planning process as described in this section addresses the phases involved with accomplishing the research, compiling data, identifying and refining initiatives, and coordinating the plan.

Phase 1

Phase I began in 2004 when Island County DEM used existing documents and resources to lay the foundation for this plan. This previous research greatly reduced the time required to compile the factual basis for the plan. Based on the implementing federal code, 44 CFR Part 201.6, the planning group adopted a five-year cycle for the mitigation plan. At this time, DEM acquired the software package "Mitigation 20/20" from the State of Washington Emergency Management Division (EMD). This powerful and detailed software package provided the specialized databases, input documents, analysis, and report generation capacity for effectively dealing with the data related to jurisdictional profiles, critical facilities, vulnerability assessment and risk rating. The reports and text generation features of this program were used for several iterations of the plan document. During this phase, initial mitigation planning goals were formulated to guide the mitigation planning effort and to limit the scope of the effort to an achievable level.

In this early part of Phase I, DEM held four public meetings – three on Whidbey Island and one on Camano Island. DEM also met with the jurisdiction planners of Coupeville, Langley, and Oak Harbor. DEM also completed a review of county and municipal codes. A survey of the unincorporated county neighborhoods was completed that documented infrastructure and existing natural hazard vulnerabilities.

In July of 2006, as part of this phase, DEM mailed some 45 informational and invitational letters to junior taxing districts and public organizations and agencies in the county. Respondents from this mailing formed the core participants for this plan.

Phase 2

A second phase of the planning was the modification of the Island County Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Analysis or HIVA for use with this plan. The Island County HIVA was modeled on the Washington State HIVA. While this edition of the hazard mitigation plan deals only with natural hazards, the original HIVA assessed the county for all classes of hazards (natural, technological, and societal). The HIVA used for this plan was limited to the natural hazards impacting the county.

Those portions of the HIVA applicable to this plan are summarized in Section 3. The modified HIVA is included in Appendix B. The HIVA identifies that Island County is vulnerable to nine natural disasters. Relative rankings based on risk indicate that of the seven hazards, four provided the most risk: severe storm (wind/rain), earthquake, wildland-interface fire, and landslide.

Data collection and verification included the physical inspection of each participating jurisdictions and neighborhoods. A hazard vulnerability assessment was done for each location. The earlier completion of the HIVA provided the necessary experience base for quickly identifying vulnerabilities and making basic risk assessments. At the same time, “at risk” areas identified from maps, aerial photos, and other records were inspected and documented. This “at risk” list was later reduced to those areas where there was or appeared to be an imminent risk for damage (Appendix C-2).

Information was also collected to complete the jurisdictional and county neighborhood profile baselines. Some of this information was collected as part of the HIVA research effort. Additional information was collected to complete neighborhood, and critical facility/infrastructure profile entries in the Mitigation 20/20 databases. Use of the Mitigation 20/20 software provided formatted forms and databases that streamlined data collection and report generation efforts. Participating agencies provided detailed profiles of their service areas, facilities, and operations. Where appropriate, profiles included values of equipment and

facilities, and other infrastructure. Also at this time any existing mitigation projects were identified and new ones solicited.

Phase 3

Concurrent with Phases 1 and 2, a survey of county and municipal codes, policy, and program documents was accomplished. The ability to access municipal and county codes and program documents on-line and on the Internet saved numerous hours of travel and on-site research. On-line access also made the direct transfer of material to the mitigation 20/20 databases extremely easy saving many hours of copying and transcription. The results of this survey indicated that for most natural disaster contributing factors and disaster consequences - the county, incorporated towns, and participating special taxing districts have enacted a comprehensive set of plans, policies, and ordinances. These documents address the contributing factors of human action (land use, drainage and water control, water treatment, construction standards, and fire protection, and others) and provide the policy without which the potential (risk) for increased loss of life and property in the county would certainly increase.

Status of Policies, Programs, and other Controls

An extensive review of the programs, policies, and county and municipal codes existing in Island County as mentioned in the previous paragraph indicates that the county and its jurisdictions have been proactive in implementing up-to-date policies and controls that provide mitigation during land use planning and zoning, construction (both infrastructure and structures), and county economic activity.

The Department of Planning and Community Development is responsible for long range planning. Long range planning is community planning that focuses more on the bigger picture, how things will be in the long term. This category includes the county Comprehensive Plan, Growth Management, Population Estimates and Projections, and a number of local issues such as the Freeland Sub-Area. Long range planning provides the guide to how and where county development, economic, recreational, and other human activity will be accommodated within the desired environment of the future.

The Island County Comprehensive Plan consists of ten volumes covering specific planning topics including: land use, water resources, shoreline, transportation, utilities and capital facilities to name a few. The county comprehensive plan is the local implementation of the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA). The Comprehensive Plan is the primary tool for addressing growth in Island County and directing that growth such that the local hazards of drainage, tidal flooding, steep slopes and interface fires are considered and the consequences mitigated to the extent technology and good practices allow. The Comprehensive Plan requires that transportation planning,

utilities, and capital facilities are sufficient in location, structure, and capacity to address the consequences of both natural and man caused hazards. It is more economical to provide this protection during development as opposed to retrofitting later.

Municipal and county codes covering a wide range of activities have sufficient mitigation provisions to meet current and proposed standards. The state and county have adopted the International Building Code (IBC) to replace the Universal Building Code (UBC) further standardizing construction requirements across the county and its jurisdictions. The UBC and now the IBC contain numerous measures that provide increased protection from hazards including fire, wind, and earthquake. Both the county and jurisdictions have adopted “best management practices,” that regulate drainage during and after construction, water source protection, unstable soils, and shoreline protection.

Balancing growth against the natural beauty and desired life style of the county is a difficult task. Growth increases land clearing, construction, demand for utilities and services, commercial activity, and traffic volume. These processes are increasingly in conflict with the restraints and limitations good planning requires. Early mitigation planning and public education are increasingly more important in cost and damage avoidance. After the fact mitigation efforts and retrofits will be too costly and economically controversial.

Phase 4

Collection of mitigation ideas and initiatives was on going during the previous phases of the process. As noted earlier, the organizations that responded to the July invitation letters formed the core group of participants and the Mitigation Planning Committee. Three planning group meetings were held, one each in August, September, and October. After the initial meeting in August, each participating organization reviewed the planning materials already collected and took away information to review with their organizations. During this period they were also provided planning templates and examples from other plans in order to move their planning and idea formulation forward as quickly as possible. The second and subsequent meeting reviewed plan progress, collected draft input and questions from the various jurisdictions and set goals for the next meeting. Agendas, rosters, and meeting notes can be found in Appendix I.

Jurisdiction ideas and mitigation proposals were captured from a number of sources. Historical information suggested likely areas of mitigation action. Current policy and document reviews validated these ideas and focused them into basic working statements. Discussions with county and municipal planners, fire officials, and construction inspectors added to the idea and initiative sources. Finally, during this phase, public meetings and meetings with local organizations were held to provide an opportunity to provide information and receive input.

Public Information and Participation

The Island County Mitigation planning group has been active in attempting to engage the general public in the planning process. Island County DEM acting for the Planning Group coordinated for newspaper articles about the mitigation process and the plan, public meetings, and various commission level hearings. Island County DEM placed the draft mitigation plan on its web page with other plans so it could be accessed by the public and by local jurisdictions. This provided easy access as the plan evolved and also saved printing costs. Each jurisdiction representative to the Planning Group was encouraged to involve both the members of their governing bodies and the residents or customers of their jurisdiction in the planning and review process. Appendix A provides the dates and locations of the public meetings and other information activities that have been undertaken to explain the mitigation planning process to the community as well as to provide mitigation awareness and education.