

Essex Emergency Stakeholders Meeting Report

July 20th, 2022

Executive Summary

The Essex County Emergency Stakeholder Meeting was held at Tappahannock-Essex Volunteer Fire Station 1 in Tappahannock, Virginia on July 20th, 2022. The meeting was convened by Essex Interim Emergency Services Chief, Tommy Hicks, with support from The Resilience Adaptation Feasibility Tool (RAFT) in an effort to update contingency plans in Essex County's emergency preparedness documentation, establish connections between relevant agencies, and identify actionable priorities to address gaps in existing disaster plans. Additionally, the meeting and this report are intended to bolster consistency within Essex's Emergency Services office for the incoming, permanent Emergency Chief. Mr. Hicks provided a presentation centering [FEMA lifelines](#) as a toolkit for maintaining critical services during disaster situations. A People, Process, Solutions workflow, in which community leaders who maintain these FEMA Lifelines openly communicate on expectations and organizational capacity, was offered as an essential method for creating long-term and effective preparation and mitigation strategies. Attendees were asked to provide their names and organizational affiliation for a participant list, fill out a survey on specific perceived community risks, prioritize the greatest of these risks as a group, and test ArcGIS software for amateur data collection during a disaster. Overcoming organizational silos for open emergency preparation, mitigation, and response was identified as critically important. Prioritized next steps include staff recruitment and training, ongoing multi-agency communication, expanding Essex County's broadband services, and acquiring various types of emergency rescue equipment.

This meeting was held in lieu of Essex County's July Implementation Team Meeting, a component of the ongoing [RAFT process](#) which is facilitated by the University of Virginia's [Institute for Engagement & Negotiation](#) (IEN) and partners at the William & Mary Coastal Policy Center and Old Dominion University. Essex Emergency Services' efforts to facilitate a conversation between relevant stakeholders was incorporated as part of the RAFT's plans to bolster community-engaged disaster-preparedness and increase access to vulnerable residents before, during, and after severe storms. As such, Mr. Hicks was primarily responsible for organizing and facilitating the 7/20 meeting, while the RAFT team captured notes and synthesized information in the following report. More information regarding Essex's [Resilience](#)

[Action Checklist](#), [Scorecard Opportunity List](#), and Implementation Team meeting summaries, can be accessed [here](#).

The following government offices and organizations were represented: Essex County, Essex Co. Fire Department, Essex Emergency Medical Services, Essex Police Department, Essex Department of Social Services, Virginia Department of Forestry, Virginia State Police, American Red Cross, Essex Planning Commission, The Olson Group, Rappahannock Electric, Department of Parks and Recreation, Virginia Department of Emergency Management, Essex School System, Chesapeake Bay Research Reserve, Just Harvest, Virginia Department of Transportation, Bay Aging, Dominion Energy, Three Rivers Health District, and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Introductions & Overview

Tommy Hicks, Interim Chief of Essex County Emergency Services, welcomed participants to the meeting, commended the work of present emergency response organizations, and provided background on Essex County's need for updated emergency plans. A brief overview on the RAFT was given by Mr. Hicks, and the RAFT team was introduced along with Tari Martin of the National Alliance for Public Safety GIS Foundation (NAPSG). Attendees were then asked to provide their names and organizational affiliation, which is included on page 9 of this report.

- Though Essex County's existing emergency response documentation is thorough, it is unclear whether it has been effectively utilized or updated since its initial publication. Additionally, references to social and environmental resiliency have generally fallen short in identifying collective and actionable priorities among emergency stakeholders.
- Fire Chief Paul Richardson commended the "unified command" among first responders demonstrated during a [devastating fire](#) that broke out in downtown Tappahannock the weekend prior. Chief Richardson noted the critical importance of emergency preparedness and training for the unexpected to achieve such coordination.
- A People, Process, Solutions workflow was recommended to utilize existing resources efficiently and effectively. This involves identifying people in the community who can impact change in the event of a disaster and mitigate afterwards, followed by identifying existing and needed resources necessary to implement change. Solutions are then pursued as funding and action can be directed in a meaningful way. This meeting primarily served to bring Essex's emergency stakeholders (People) together to establish connections that would make Processes and subsequent Solutions possible.
- The RAFT's goal in aiding Virginia's coastal localities with flooding and coastal storm hazards through bolstering environmental, social, and economic resilience aligned with Essex Emergency Services' efforts to develop a long-term resilience plan in the county. As such, the RAFT was invited to help facilitate the meeting and incorporate insights into its long-term resiliency recommendations.
- Setting processes among Essex's emergency stakeholders, defined by FEMA Lifelines, is crucial to receiving federal funding and maintaining consistent contingency plans during

disaster scenarios. All attendees were invited due to their relevance within one or more of the below [Lifelines](#).

- Safety & Security
- Food, Water, and Shelter
- Health & Medical
- Energy
- Communications
- Transportation
- Hazardous Materials

Inventory of Stakeholders

Attendees were asked to provide their names and organizational affiliations. Thirty-two introductions were collected and have been organized according to their respective FEMA lifeline below. A list of all stakeholders and their contact information is included at the end of this report as Appendix A.

Safety & Security

1. **Warren Coburn**, Senior Area Forester for Essex County and Northern Neck, Virginia
Department of Forestry
2. **Allie Hersch**, Senior Associate, The Olson Group
3. **Nelson Hillyer**, Forester for Essex County, Virginia Department of Forestry
4. **Sheriff Arnie Holmes**, Sheriff, Essex County Sheriff's Office
5. **Charles Huntley**, Technology Director, Essex County
6. **Jay Mitchell**, Chief Deputy, Essex County Sheriff's Office
7. **Paul Richardson**, Fire Chief, Tappahannock-Essex Volunteer Fire Department
8. **Ernest Sadler**, Building Official and Director of Facilities, Essex County
9. **Troy Smith**, Commander for Essex County, Virginia State Police

Food, Water, and Shelter

1. **Jay Grebe**, Executive Director, Just Harvest
2. **Mark Kilgore**, Chief Dam Safety Engineer, Department of Conservation & Recreation
Division of Dam Safety and Floodplain Management
3. **Robbie Longest**, Essex County Extension Agent, Virginia Cooperative Extension
4. **Dave McGee**, Liaison for Essex, West Moreland, and King George, American Red Cross
5. **Candace Mickelborough**, Director, Essex Social Services
6. **Turner Minx**, Extension Agent, Virginia Cooperative Extension
7. **Stephen Moore**, Disaster Program Manager in the Middle Peninsulas, American Red Cross
8. **Patricia Wolfrey**, Director for Rappahannock Territory, American Red Cross

Health & Medical

1. **Alexis Burrell**, Population Health Coordinator, Three Rivers Health District
2. **Amy Huntland**, Point of Dispensing Coordinator, Three Rivers Health District

Energy

1. **Bill Baber**, Dominion Energy
2. **Travis Payne**, Supervisor of Distribution, Dominion Energy
3. **Melanie Rapp Beale**, Community Affairs Director, Dominion Energy

Communications

1. **Rob Acres**, Chairman of the Board, Essex County Board of Supervisors
2. **Kyle Durham**, Deputy Chief of Emergency Fire Services, Head of Communications for Essex, Essex County Emergency Services
3. **Cirse Gonzalez**, Training Coordinator, Chesapeake Bay NERR
4. **Sidney Johnson**, Board of Supervisors member, Essex County

Transportation

1. **Lee McKnight**, Saluda Residency, Virginia Department of Transportation
2. **Ken Pollock**, Transit Director, Bay Transit

Other

1. **Dianna Carneal**, Essex County Planning Commission (Recovery)
2. **John Fugman**, Division 1 Chief for Fire Programs, Virginia Department of Fire Programs (Training and Emergency Management)
3. **Donna Pletch**, Chief Regional Coordinator, Virginia Department of Emergency Management (Emergency Management)
4. **Dr. Tara Temple**, Assistant Superintendent, Essex County Public Schools (Education)

Identifying Risks, Gaps, and Priorities

Issues with prior hazard mitigation and adaptation plans largely center on a failure to hold a continuous dialogue across agencies. Valuable insights and prescriptions produced for Hazard Mitigation Plans and similar documents are ineffective if relevant stakeholders are not consistently engaged and these insights are not incorporated within their respective agencies. Overcoming organizational silos is of paramount importance. In an effort to recognize collective concerns and prior to addressing preparedness gaps, attendees were each asked to identify the greatest risks in Essex County in one-or-two words. These results are included below:

Stakeholder-Identified Risks

- Communication
- Flooding
- Hurricanes
- Crime
- Substance Abuse
- Hunger
- Uncertified Dams
- Weather-Related Events
- Complacency
- People

Due to the extensive research and preparation required by grant applications, identifying and prioritizing various concerns within Essex County through an established methodology is necessary to receive maximum funding from federal entities. After listing their perceived primary risks, attendees each identified five topics that would address gaps that leave Essex at risk during disaster scenarios. These topics were then organized according to their relevance to People, Processes, or Solutions. Attendees then voted on which topics were of greatest importance, therefore collectively prioritizing gaps and needs in emergency planning. The most popular of these topics are listed below in order of priority. A full list of topics is included as Appendix B.

“People” Relevant Gaps

- Training in:
 - Emergency Management
 - CERT
 - Fire
 - EMS
 - EOC
 - Technical Rescue
 - Solar Farming
 - Electric Lines
 - Dam Ownership
- Recruitment of qualified staff and retention of current staff
- Teacher recruitment
- Establishing a social network to assist vulnerable populations
- Lodging for emergency response personnel

“Process” Relevant Gaps

- Multi-agency communication
- Creating a contact list for community resources
- Identifying elderly/disabled residents in the community

- Damage assessment
- Improving access and diversification of communication networks

“Solution” Relevant Gaps

- Broadband expansion
- Equipment for swift-water rescue (boats, high water vehicles, etc.)
- Mobile response command center
- Resource database for public assistance agencies and services
- Improvements to the emergency operations center

Many opportunities for start-up funding are available, whether it be for regional volunteer fire training, shelter upgrades, flood mitigation assistance, infrastructure maintenance, school violence prevention, community policing, or a variety of other grants that could address any aspect of Essex’s long-term resilience. Coordination among stakeholders to prioritize initiatives and gather resources for applications is a crucial first step to taking full advantage of existing support programs.

Finding Data

When seeking funding through grants or private patronage, data is a critical tool in building a story and making the case that there are indeed gaps that require additional assistance. As such, identifying sources of appropriate data is necessary when developing an efficient and standardized funding-application plan.

- To demonstrate the extent of available data relevant to hazard risks, Mr. Hicks provided attendees with a [HAZUS](#) report based on a 100-year hurricane model run on Essex County. This particular report included statistics on building vulnerability, essential facilities, debris estimates, household displacement, and the economic impact of building damage. Having these projections prior to a catastrophic storm scenario allows for preparatory resource allocation in areas such as task force building or locating appropriately sized disaster shelters.
- Tari Martin of NAPSG stressed the importance of finding available and relevant data prior to disaster scenarios when immediate priorities prevent in-depth information research. While the best data for a particular locality is typically collected at a local level, national agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or the United States Geological Survey (USGS) are constantly gathering imagery that could subsequently be used for damage assessment purposes. Aerial imagery can be secured from the National Insurance Crime Bureau or the Civil Air Patrol upon request, and access is primarily dependent on simply knowing where to find it.

Mr. Hicks then delivered an overview of ArcGIS survey software which allows for datapoint collection from any personal cellphone logged on to the Essex County Hazard Risk Assessment page.

- During rapidly developing hazard scenarios such as severe storms, having amateur data collection which can identify things such as downed trees, local flooding areas, or untraversable roads could have a major impact while emergency services are temporarily scrambled.
- Attendees were asked to walk around the Fire Station 1 grounds and submit location points around potential risks such as unsound buildings or potentially dangerous flood areas. This demonstrated the relative ease of grassroots hazard mitigation when coupled with contemporary GIS software.
- A link to the sample Essex County Hazard Risk Assessment is provided [here](#). Questions included organizational affiliation, hazard location, hazard type, hazard status, and a picture submission of the identified risk.

Concluding Comments

A round of comments were taken prior to the conclusion of the Emergency Stakeholders Meeting. These are recorded below.

- **Donna Pletch**, Chief Regional Coordinator, Virginia Department of Emergency Management
 - There's a lot of focus on training. We'll see how we can assist and bring programs down here. We do have a shortage of instructors, so we'll see if we can get some locals who can help with that. We have hazard mitigation grants. It's much better to scope out grants now even if you have to go back and get a quote.
- **Mark Kilgore**, Chief Dam Safety Engineer, Department of Conservation & Recreation Division of Dam Safety and Floodplain Management
 - No dams have been certified in Essex. There's a black box risk/ I did training with an emergency manager in Henrico. We made sure emergency operations would be functional during a dam break. It's a lot like a flash flood, but it's really important that these dams get certified and regularly inspected. If they're deficient, can they be adequately repaired? Will they really be able to cover 20 inches of rain? With these ponds and lakes that serve as a water supply, if a dam breaks, then a big supply for fighting fires is lost.
- **Paul Richardson**, Fire Chief, Tappahannock-Essex Volunteer Fire Department
 - Never turn down help. Fires change really quickly, and reaction is paramount. You have to think on your feet and take in all available information. No dams have broken since Cheatswood about ten years ago.

- **Dr. Tara Temple**, Assistant Superintendent, Essex County Public Schools
 - I appreciate meeting people today. From the school side we're trying to make sure everything is in place; the theme this year is chasing excellence. We want to be more proactive than reactive. We're working with social services today, finding out about shelters from Red Cross, meeting with Dominion Energy, and planning to follow up. All of these organizations are important for our school system and training our kids to the best of our ability. But they're vulnerable. When something happens, we need to know who to call, why we're calling, and what they can do for us. We make sure a flow can be put in place during emergency situations. We're pushing really hard for active shooter training. You might be getting a lot of emails from me; I'm not stopping until we get what we need for our staff and students.
- **Cirse Gonzalez**, Training Coordinator, Chesapeake Bay NERR
 - The goal of my program is informed decision-making. My ears perked up when I heard the need for training. Where there is room for that, like with VDEM, I can help bring that to you, connect with resources, and help with the communication part.
- **Ken Pollock**, Transit Director, Bay Transit
 - This is a good start. Not the end all be all, but it's been great to get a handle on who is here and what we're doing in the community. This needs to be done at least annually if not more than that. There are new players who come along, and we need to keep our lines of communication open.
- **Stephen Moore**, Disaster Program Manager in the Middle Peninsulas, American Red Cross
 - Doors are opening, handshakes have been made. It's been great to meet people in person and put an exclamation point on why we need to be doing this.
- **Travis Payne**, Supervisor of Distribution, Dominion Energy
 - The ArcGIS map is a great tool. We have something similar at Dominion. I can roll up to something and document it very easily. I can then distribute resources quickly and effectively.

Meeting Attendees

- Alexis Burrell (Three Rivers Health District)
- Allie Hersch (The Olson Group)
- Amy Huntland (Three Rivers Health District)
- Sheriff Arnie Holmes, (Essex County Sheriff's Office)
- Bill Baber (Dominion Energy)
- Candace Mickelborough (Essex Social Services)
- Charles Huntley (Essex County)
- Dave McGee (American Red Cross)
- Dianna Carneal (Essex County Planning Commission)
- Donna Pletch (Virginia Department of Emergency Management)
- Ernest Sadler (Essex County)
- Jay Grebe (Just Harvest)
- Jay Mitchell (Essex County Sheriff's Office)
- John Fugman (Virginia Department of Fire Programs)
- Ken Pollock (Bay Transit)
- Kyle Durham (Essex County Emergency Services)
- Lee McKnight (Virginia Department of Transportation)
- Mark Kilgore (Department of Conservation & Recreation Division of Dam Safety and Floodplain Management)
- Melanie Rapp Beale (Dominion Energy)
- Nelson Hillyer (Virginia Department of Forestry)
- Paul Richardson, (Tappahannock-Essex Volunteer Fire Department)
- Patricia Wolfrey (American Red Cross)
- Rob Akers (Essex County Board of Supervisors)
- Robbie Longest (Virginia Cooperative Extension)
- Stephen Moore (American Red Cross)
- Sidney Johnson (Essex County Board of Supervisors)
- Dr. Tara Temple (Essex County Public Schools)
- Travis Payne (Dominion Energy)
- Troy Smith (Virginia State Police)
- Turner Minx (Virginia Cooperative Extension)
- Warren Coburn (Virginia Department of Forestry)

Appendix A: Meeting Attendee Contact Information

| Name | Affiliation | Email | Phone |
|-----------------------|---|--|----------------|
| Alexis Burrell | Three Rivers Health District | alexis.burrell@vdh.virginia.gov | (804) 758-2381 |
| Allie Hersch | The Olson Group | info@olsongrouppltd.com | (703) 518-9982 |
| Amy Huntland | Three Rivers Health District | [-] | (804) 758-2381 |
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| Sheriff Arnie Holmes | Essex County Sheriff's Office | Wholmes@essex-virginia.org | (804) 443-3346 |
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|--------------------|--|--|----------------|
| Kyle Durham | Essex County Emergency Services | Kdurham@essex-virginia.org | (804) 445-4934 |
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| Nelson Hillyer | Virginia Department of Forestry | nelson.hillyer@dof.virginia.gov | (804) 443-2211 |
| Paul Richardson | Tappahannock-Essex Volunteer Fire Department | Prichardson457@gmail.com | (804) 443-3346 |
| Patricia Wolfrey | American Red Cross | Patricia.wolfrey@redcross.org | (540) 226-3489 |
| Rob Akers | Essex County Board of Supervisors | rakers@essex-virginia.org | (804) 443-2373 |
| Robbie Longest | Virginia Cooperative Extension | robbiel7@vt.edu | (804) 443-3551 |
| Stephen Moore | American Red Cross | stephen.moore2@redcross.org | (540) 395-7064 |
| Sidney Johnson | Essex County Board of Supervisors | sjohnson@essex-virginia.org | (804) 443-4479 |
| Dr. Tara Temple | Essex County Public Schools | Ttemple@essex.k12.va.us | (804) 994-8406 |
| Travis Payne | Dominion Energy | [-] | (804) 462-3007 |
| Troy Smith | Virginia State Police | Troy.Smith@vsp.virginia.gov | (804) 333-3800 |
| Turner Minx | Virginia Cooperative Extension | turnerminx@vt.edu | (804) 769-4955 |
| Warren Coburn | Virginia Department of Forestry | warren.coburn@dof.virginia.gov | (804) 238-0539 |

Appendix B: All Gaps Identified by Stakeholders

“People” Relevant Gaps

- Training dam owners and get EAPs
- Electric line safety & training
- More Training
- Training
 - Emergency Management
 - CERT
 - Fire
 - EMS
 - EOC
 - Technical Rescue
- Teachers
- More contacts
- Training, solar farms, safety of firefighters
- Additional preparation before emergency situations
- Mental illness support
- Poverty
- Need someone designated to focus on grants
- Daytime firefighter
- Public safety personnel
- Training in all areas
- Training (ICS)
- Recruitment of qualified staff and retention of current staff
- Need outreach to groups already established
- More PID support in emergency management
- Grant writer/manager
- Lodging for first responders
- Training for County leadership on their role in a disaster
- Staffing, paid & volunteer personnel

“Process” Relevant Gaps

- Dam inspectors
- Make information more available as resources within community
- Early collaboration within community, town/county to see if there’s benefits/additional resources
- Continued updated communication within county EMS
- Communication matrix/workflow
- More training

- Damage assessment training/policies
- More with hotels
- Regional response plan
- Emergency planning
- Taskforce for Roadways - VDOT, Essex, REC
- Regular meetings between partners/agencies to discuss scenarios and responsibilities to be better prepared in the event of a natural disaster
- Damage assessment training
- Relationship building between agencies
- Contact list, who has what resources
- Tabletops for dams
- Identifying elderly and disabled folks in the community that will need extra assistance during a natural disaster
- Multi-agency communications
- Training and MOUs to outline who is responsible for what during a natural disaster
- MOU/MOA between health partners and local entities
- MOU with other localities for staffing and aid
- Contingency plans for each department/agency
- Identify partners
- Community education and preparedness
- Community trust and collaboration
- Staffing and funding
 - Need support to receive funding needed to meet needs
 - Grants w/additional marketability for funding streams
- Social network in support of vulnerable populations
 - e.g. “neighborhood watch” for senior citizens during post events
- Risk/hazard awareness and training
- Community based monitoring
 - e.g. water quality, sea level rise
- Strategies to recruit and retain first responders, teachers, and other professionals
- Trained professionals in more places at more levels within communities
- Community relationships
 - Connections between neighbors
 - Connections between citizens and professionals
 - Connections between community leaders, citizens, professionals
- A person who serves as the main contact to let all agencies know what is going on during an incident

“Solutions” Relevant Gaps

- More broadband
- Engage rain gauge network

- Boats to access areas of damage
- Stream gauger for dams
- Communication, cell signal
- Access to high water vehicles
- Training
- Physical security improvements to county buildings
- Broadband/cell towers
- Internet! Bandwidth!
- Appropriate/adequate emergency response equipment/technology
- POC cheat sheet
- Security operations center, regional/national
- Mobile response command center
- Election security
- Improvements to EOC
- Shelters
- Water rescue equipment
- More detailed training
 - e.g. active shooter training
- Resource database of public assistance agencies/services
- Communications
- Infrastructures
 - Highway
 - IT
 - Debris removal
- Equipment
 - Boats, rescue equipment for swift water rescue
- Community alert system/notifications
- Community training on health topics relevant to our county
- Diverse business opportunities instead of monopolies
 - e.g. Cox Communications
- Improved broadband/wifi capability
- Drills/exercises
 - Tabletop
 - Functional
- Command post
- Clean, readily available water supply
- Flood mitigation (natural infrastructure)
- Reversed traffic patterns to reduce congestion in town
- Back-up equipment for technology
- Reliable communication infrastructure
 - Internet

- Cell towers
- High Speed internet throughout the county
- Main street revitalization
- Flood mitigation study
 - HMP updates
 - FMA/CRS plan elevation
- Work with fire department
 - Needs
 - Expectations
 - Capability
- Strategies planning for hurricane response
- Crisis management planning process in palace w/al stakeholders involved yearly to stay abreast of resources EM and DSS
- Improved access to communications and more varied methods for information sharing
- Understanding of communication as it relates to who serves as incident command for different events

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