Community Outreach and Engagement Plan

What is the Community Outreach and Engagement Plan?

In accordance with HB516/SB551, passed during the 2022 General Assembly Session, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (the Department), jointly with the Director of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion, have prepared this Community Outreach and Engagement Plan (COEP) to support the development and updates of the Coastal Resilience Master Plan and the Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan (the Plans).

The COEP is designed to be a framework for a whole community approach to outreach that will allow the Department to involve a wide range of stakeholders and impacted parties in the Development of the Plans. To that end, the COEP describes overall goals, the type of outreach activities that will be conducted, and the general approach that the Department will take in conducting these outreach activities. Detailed actions and deliverables to fulfill this framework will be developed through a Request for Proposal that the Department intends to issue as the means of developing the Plans themselves.

Enactment Clause 3 of HB516/SB551 (2022) Directs the Department as follows:

> *The Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (the Department), jointly with the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and in coordination with the Chief Resilience Officer and the Special Assistant to the Governor for Coastal Adaptation and Protection, shall prepare a Community Outreach and Engagement Plan for updates to the Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan and for development and updates to the Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan (the Plans) no later than December 31, 2022. The outreach and engagement plan shall strive for meaningful involvement by ensuring that (i) affected and vulnerable community residents have access and opportunity to participate in the full cycle of the decision-making process about the development of and updates to the Plans, and (ii) decision-makers shall seek out and consider such participation, allowing the views and perspectives of community residents to shape and influence decisions. The Department shall seek input to the Community Outreach and Engagement Plan from representatives of Virginia Indian tribes, community-based organizations, the public health sector, nongovernmental organizations, civil rights organizations, communities impacted by recurring flooding, and the Emergency Management Equity Working Group established pursuant to subdivision B 19 of § 44-146.18 of the Code of Virginia.*

What are the Coastal Resilience and the Virginia Flood Protection Master Plans?

The Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan (CRMP)

The CRMP is an integral document that charts the course to adapt and protect Virginia's Coast. The CRMP builds on the 2020 Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Planning Framework, which outlined core principles and goals of Virginia's coastal resilience strategy. Given the urgency around the issue of

coastal flooding and sea level rise, the CRMP focused on the impacts of tidal and storm surge flooding on coastal Virginia.

Nearly six million people, or 70% of the state's population, call coastal Virginia home. Virginia's coastal regions contain flourishing economic sectors, important cultural and historical assets, and diverse communities and natural features. But the region faces a growing threat. Between rising sea levels and changing precipitation patterns, Virginia has already recorded changes to the frequency and intensity of floods that pose increasingly greater risks to our communities. And while flooding impacts all Virginians, it does not affect all Virginians equally. Many communities lack the resources to combat these increasingly prevalent threats.

Phase Two of the CRMP, which the Department is required to complete by 2024, will improve and expand on rainfall and riverine hazard assessments, data collection, project planning and prioritization, and outreach and engagement of under resourced communities. The Commonwealth is obligated to update the CRMP every five years. Implementation of the CRMP will be managed by the Department in consultation with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), and with guidance and support from the Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) and the Special Assistant for Coastal Adaptation and Protection (SACAP).

The Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan (FPMP)

The FPMP for the Commonwealth, which is an existing document that has not been updated since 2005, is required by the Code of Virginia to be a place-specific plan for mitigating severe and repetitive flooding across the Commonwealth. The FPMP shall, at a minimum,

1. base decision making on the best-available science;
2. identify and address socioeconomic inequities and strive to enhance equity through the adaptation and protection measures by considering all areas of recurrent flooding;
3. recognize the importance of protecting and enhancing natural infrastructure and nature-based approaches to flood mitigation, when possible;
4. utilize community and regional scale planning to the maximum extent possible, seeking region-specific approaches tailored to the needs of individual communities; and
5. include an understanding of fiscal realities and focus on cost-effective solutions for the protection and adaptation of communities, businesses, and critical infrastructure.

The FPMP shall include, at a minimum:

a. An inventory of flood-prone areas;
b. An inventory of flood protection studies;
c. A record of flood damages;
d. Strategies to prevent or mitigate flood damage; and
e. The collection and distribution of information relating to flooding and flood plain management.

The FPMP shall be reviewed and updated by the Department on a regular basis, but at least once every five years, and for each of the items listed in provisions a through e, the plan shall state when that provision was last updated and when the next update is planned. The plan shall be maintained in an online format so as to be easily accessed by other government entities and by the public. The online plan shall contain links to the most current information available from other federal, state, and local sources. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Department upon request.

Pursuant to § 10.1-659. Flood protection programs; coordination. C, 5. The Director of the Department shall prepare the Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan using a watershed-based approach no later than December 31, 2026.

What's Been Done So Far?

In 2020 the Department released the Coastal Resilience Master Plan Framework to develop a roadmap for coastal resilience in the Commonwealth. In December 2021 the Department published the Coastal Resilience Master Plan Phase 1. Both of these documents were published to Townhall in October of 2022 for public comment for the first time since being created.

A Coastal Resilience Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was reestablished by HB516/SB551 to assist with developing, updating, and implementing the Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan. The TAC is required to meet quarterly and held their first meeting in September of 2022.

Separate from the COEP, the Department has conducted both individual and organizational flooding impact studies, attended community events and meetings to raise awareness of the CRMP Phase I, and held regular meetings with nongovernmental organizations to brief them on the status of the planning process.

Why is This Important?

We must address challenges related to flooding and resilience through coordinated and cohesive plans that allow us to leverage limited resources to maximize benefits. The challenges related to flooding and resilience impact all parts of Virginia. In meeting these challenges, we must do so in a way that works for all Virginians. Virginians deserve to have a say in the development and implementation of the plans and policies that governments will use to address it. In order for Virginians to have a meaningful say, our efforts must be transparent. Virginians must also be given the opportunity to provide meaningful input into the plans and solutions we intend to use to address these challenges. For this to occur, outreach is required: we cannot expect Virginians to come to us, we must be prepared to go to them. The Community Outreach and Engagement Plan is the framework we will use to ensure that we meet these goals.

What Do We Want to Accomplish through the COEP?

The goal of the COEP is to empower residents and stakeholders, especially those who live and work in hazard zones, to provide their local knowledge and experience to the planning process. Providing planning resources and opportunities to residents and stakeholders will encourage ownership and

responsibility in community led efforts to shape and influence decisions in the planning process. The Department seeks to ensure communities historically marginalized in the public outreach and engagement process are encouraged to contribute, shape and influence decisions in the planning process by reducing barriers surrounding public engagement, including, but not limited to: language, time of day, location, mobility and accessibility. In short, our goal is to reach beyond individuals and organizations who are generally represented through various types of stakeholder committees.

How Do We Intend to Approach This?

The Department will adopt a "whole community" approach to outreach and engagement. The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Whole Community Preparedness approach is that: Preparedness is a shared responsibility that calls for the involvement of everyone—not just the government—in preparedness efforts. By working together, everyone can help keep the nation safe from harm and help keep it resilient when struck by hazards, such as natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and pandemics. Whole Community includes:

- Individuals and families, including those with access and functional needs
- Businesses
- Faith-based and community organizations
- Nonprofit groups
- Schools and academia
- Media outlets
- All levels of government, including state, local, tribal, territorial, and federal partners

It is important to leverage partnerships with trusted regional and local subject matter experts, stakeholders, and convenors such as, colleges and universities, non-profits and community groups, business organizations, local elected leaders, and Tribal Nations.

What Types of Outreach Will We Conduct?

The Department's outreach efforts will include four categories:

1. Inform: The intent is to simply provide information. This may include fact sheets, participation in community led open house events, presentations, social media, and other media presence. Activities that educate and raise awareness of The Plans would fall in this category.

2. Consult: The intent is to obtain public feedback and to acknowledge and respond to feedback in the decision-making process. This may include public comment processes, focus groups, surveys, etc. that demonstrates the Department's commitment to listen and operationalize their concerns.

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3. Involve: The intent is to directly integrate the public's concerns and goals in the decision-making process. This may include interactive workshops, community meetings and forums and other similar events.

4. Collaborate: The intent is to operationalize the leadership and expertise of residents and stakeholders in the implementation of decision making. This may include citizen advisory committees for collaborative decision making, collaborative data gathering and analysis, or partnership agreements.

What Actions Will We Take?

Using the four types of outreach described above, the Department will:

1. Align and integrate the COEP process with existing federal, state, and local programs to provide additional resources and synergies.
    - Collaborate with other state agencies with federal programs influenced by flooding
        - Department of Environmental Quality
        - Virginia Department of Transportation
        - Virginia Department of Emergency Management
        - Department of Energy
        - Department of Housing and Community Development
        - Virginia Department of Health
    - FEMA Community Rating System
    - FEMA Hazard Mitigation Plan 44 CRF Requirement
2. Leverage partnerships with trusted regional and local subject matter experts, stakeholders, and convenors that serve the communities:
    a. Colleges and Universities
    b. Non-profits, Faith-Based Groups, and Other Community Groups
    c. Business Organizations
    d. All Levels of Local Elected Officials
    e. Tribal Nations
3. Involve and collaborate with residents and stakeholders in a Whole Community approach. This means:
    - Holding outreach and engagement activities during various times of day, days of the week, and at varied types of events and locations throughout the Commonwealth to ensure adequate opportunities for community members to attend. Outreach and engagement activities will be conducted in all regions of the state.

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- Providing adequate information to organizations ahead of time to allow full participation in the planning process.
- Using both in-person and virtual meetings equitably.
- Seeking to hold outreach outside of government buildings and within the community at-large, where feasible and appropriate.
- Developing a media communications plan that reaches all residents, where they are, and to the greatest extent possible. This includes communicating via minority-owned publications (newspapers, radio shows, websites, and tv shows) as well as publications run by immigrant groups in areas impacted by flooding.
- Where appropriate, developing materials and providing information using plain language that is understandable to the layperson.
- Working with internal and external partners to ensure where needed and as resources permit, outreach and engagement activities and materials are translated and accessible to local populations, specifically, minority or diaspora groups prioritizing Spanish and with an effort to increase capacity for other languages that are prevalent in the Commonwealth.
- As resources permit, publishing outreach materials, releases, and reports in accessible formats and that meet standard for the blind and visually impaired.
- Providing an interpreter for the deaf upon request for meetings and including closed caption broadcasting for recorded presentations as resources permit.

4. Maintain this community outreach and engagement plan as a living document, to be updated throughout the outreach and engagement process in the development and implementation of the Plans.

Conclusion

As required by HB516/SB551 (2022), the Department Conservation and Recreation and the Director of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion have prepared this Community Outreach and Engagement Plan as a framework for a whole community approach that will leverage stakeholders as the Department develops the plans that will guide the Commonwealth's resilience and flood mitigation efforts. By taking efforts to inform, consult, involve, and collaborate with community and government leaders, stakeholders, and residents impacted by flooding, we will craft a more robust, inclusive, and transparent approach to addressing these important issues.

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