

Civic Association Resident Advisory Group Meeting - Resilient NJ

MEETING MINUTES

DATE: June 10, 2021
TO: All Meeting Attendees
FROM: The Consultant Team
SUBJECT: Resilient NJ - Atlantic County Coastal Communities (ACCR) – Civic Association Resident Advisory Group Meeting

A meeting was held on June 10, 2021 at 5:00 – 6:30 PM with the Civic Associations Resident Advisory Group to discuss the Resilient NJ Project. The meeting was held via Google Meet. The following were in attendance:

Name	Organization	Email
Tony Vraim	Atlantic City Zoning Board	vrain811@comcast.net
David Grossman	Margate Homeowner’s Association	grossdoc@yahoo.com
Louis Strugala		lstrugala@yahoo.com
Bill Sill	President of St. Leonard’s Tract Homeowner’s Association	wjstecommlaw@gmail.com
Tom Heist	Heist Insurance	Theist@heistinsurance.com
Dena Ferrone		Denaferone@gmail.com
Irvin Moreno		irvin.moreno.rodriguez@gmail.com
Michael Cagno	President of Ducktown Neighborhood Association	mcagno@noyesmuseum.org
Surajit Chowdhury	City of Atlantic City	schowdhury@cityofatlanticcity.org
Walter Johnson	Atlantic City School Board	2walterjohnson@comcast.net
Frank Becktel		becktel@comcast.net

The following was discussed at the meeting:

- 1) Past Experiences - We asked residents about their past experiences with disasters. The conversation centered on the experience with Hurricane Sandy in 2012.
 - a) Infrastructure
 - i) Impacts included roads and sewer lines floating up
 - ii) Infrastructure should be the responsibility of the government
 - (1) All homeowners required to put in new sewer lines rather than Atlantic City address the issue with the system
 - (2) Lack of government responsibility to clean up the sewers led to costly mold issues in many homes

- iii) Atlantic City High School served as a resource center, but it needs more resources to help the community
 - b) Scams & Safety
 - i) There were many scams and people taking advantage of vulnerable people after Sandy
 - (1) Many families were left to fend for themselves after the grant funding ended because grant funding is not sustainable
 - (2) REM grants - \$150,000 sounds like a lot of money, but it often did not cover what was needed to fix the house. Many people spent unwisely or were left with projects half complete when the money ran out.
 - ii) There was looting after the storm, which may make people less likely to evacuate next time
 - iii) Many people are still not recovered, either living in moldy homes or forced to leave because they ran out of money to finish repairs or elevate their homes above the flood level.
 - c) Lack of knowledge
 - i) Emergency relief and assistance programs were not well coordinated, priorities were not always aligned and equitable, some efforts were redundant while others were left out. Lack of centralized organization of assistance programs made it difficult to navigate and find the programs you needed.
 - ii) Politicians need to get to know their City and its residents
 - iii) Many people do not have access to the internet in Atlantic City, need to consider this when getting messages out – especially in the immediate aftermath when electricity and internet connections may be down
 - iv) People who evacuated and second homeowners did not know the status of their home
 - (1) Many called the police to ask about their homes exactly at the time when the police needed to be helping with the recovery.
 - (2) Then people started coming to the islands to try to see the damage, which meant police had to keep people from entering the islands as they tried to focus on the response.
- 2) What should be done in the future?
 - a) Assets
 - i) Consider grocery stores and pharmacies as critical infrastructure needs – this was made evident during the pandemic
 - ii) Schools and playgrounds are important for children and communities
 - b) Coordinate Services
 - i) Centralize services and resources in a few locations
 - ii) Take care of people’s immediate needs with food, shelters, clothing, and money after a disaster
 - iii) Designate a person for resilience with true authority to make decisions at the County level
 - (1) Every County has different concerns, experiences, cultures, so County level is good. Need to combine state and non-profit resources.
 - iv) Need access to legal aid
 - (1) After Sandy there were many contractors taking advantage of people, which was especially easy because attorney review of contracts was not required. Before people get more than \$5-10k, there should be an attorney review to ensure the homeowner is protected.
 - v) Create a list of trusted contractors and other support services
 - vi) Treat everyone the same – do not prioritize homeowners over renters and second homeowners
 - vii) Create bridge loans to elevate housing because it is currently a reimbursement program and people are borrowing money they cannot pay back

- c) Infrastructure & Zoning
 - i) Consider infrastructure a public good and do not have each homeowner pay for a new sewer connection when it could be solved as a system problem
 - ii) Invest in infrastructure including roads and transit
 - (1) Many sinkholes were due to previous poor patching jobs
 - (2) Many people lost their personal automobiles and were left without the ability to travel in the aftermath
 - iii) Consider playgrounds, recreation centers, and schools as critical infrastructure for community children in the immediate aftermath
 - iv) Elevate or redevelop row homes as a group – they cannot be raised individually
 - v) At what point do you stop people from building on the ground level?
 - (1) Create a Blue Acres program to keep areas that are extremely flood prone from being rebuilt time and again. These spaces can become open space used in new ways, similar to the Netherlands “Room for the River” Floodway Program creating designated spaces for flooding. In dry times, they can be parks and open space.
 - d) Education & Awareness
 - i) Reaching people
 - (1) Create a centralized information portal online to help people find comprehensive information about how and where to find help
 - (a) It should include information like encouraging people not to call the police or visit the area immediately after the storm
 - (b) It should also offer tips on what to do BEFORE a disaster happens
 - (2) Use the automated phone call system the schools use to reach people who may not have internet
 - (3) The best way to reach people in Atlantic City is with the civic associations/CDCs
 - ii) Communicate the successes
 - (1) Atlantic City zoning was updated after Sandy and flood risk considerations have been integrated.
 - (2) Atlantic City has done a great job enforcing FEMA rules and getting the CRS points discount on flood insurance for all residents
 - (3) Communicate the benefits that dunes, sea walls, storm drains, and bulkheads have had in protecting the area – it has been political in some areas, need to educate the community to gain support
- 3) Vision - We asked residents about their vision for a safer, more resilient community.
- a) Residents shared that they envisioned a future where the government helps people understand the risk of climate change and creates partnerships so there can be one central location for resources and services before, during, and after disasters.
 - b) Another resident shared that there is a study about how Wal-Mart had their stores open within three days of disasters, but it took FEMA a week to get people to the sites. The residents hoped the region could be more like the Wal-Mart example than the FEMA example.
 - c) Finally, residents understood that they live on barrier island and so they must learn to live with the water. They hope that resilience strategies can help them live with the water so they can remain on the islands for another 100 years.

Action Items:

- Next focus group will be held in September, CHPlanning to reach out at least one month in advance to choose a date.