

Meeting Minutes – Resilient Neighbors Network 11:00 am ET Friday, September 22, 2017

Resilient Neighbors Network (RNN) is a network of professionals representing communities actively working toward adaptation and resilience from natural hazards.

RNN Mission

To increase resilience in existing and developing communities at the grass roots level by documenting and actively sharing best practices, through education, peer to peer collaboration and mentoring.

RNN Vision

RNN will be a source for a compilation of community driven hazard resilience best practices that can serve as a resource to people & communities before, during and after a disaster. RNN will also actively bring ground truth and grassroots enlightenment to policy makers, researchers, regulators, and journalists.

AGENDA:

1. Roll call
2. Approval of July and August Minutes
3. Welcome of new RNN Member Bill Ramsey, Muncy Borough, Pennsylvania
4. Report from Vincent Brown of FEMA on the many things happening in FEMA Headquarters
5. Discussion of Hurricane Harvey, Irma, Maria and how RNN members can reach out and assist local communities impacted by these hurricanes.
6. Comments/Issues/Good News

11:00 am ET - CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL:

1. ROLL CALL:

Present: **Barb Miller** (Jefferson County); **Stephen Allen** (Jefferson County); **Gene Henry** (Hillsborough County); **Bill Ramsey** (Borough of Muncy, PA); **Tim Trautman** (Mecklenburg County, NC); **Roger Faris** (Seattle, WA); **Rebecca Joyce** (Shenandoah Valley Region, VA); **Tom Hughes** (NHMA Board Member); **Ed Thomas** (NHMA Board Member)

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Rebecca Joyce opened the floor for discussion of the July 2017 and August 2017 Minutes. A Motion to approve the Minutes was made by Barb Miller. The Motion was seconded by Rebecca Joyce. There being no discussion, it was **VOTED**, July 2017 and August 2017 Minutes were approved.

Rebecca Joyce welcomed Bill Ramsey of Muncy Borough, PA to the RNN and invited him to introduce himself and say a few words about Muncy. Bill Ramsey shared that he is the Muncy Borough Manager, has been for five years. Prior to that he was with the Pensacola School District for 36 years and retired to work part time with Muncy Borough. Muncy Borough is in the north-central part of the state, has about 2,700 people, and is right on the west branch of the Susquehanna River. The town is very old, having been established in 1769 as a Colonial settlement, and is very rural. The south end of the town is right along the river, which is their flood plain area, and constitutes 41% of the town. They also have two creeks, one of which goes right through the center of town, all of which combine to cause their flooding events. As a result, they are deep into the issue of resiliency with regard to infrastructure and flooding.

Rebecca Joyce shared that though the RNN is a very informal group, we have a lot of members with expertise in flooding and other hazard mitigation areas, who are very willing to help and share from their experience. Barb Miller and Gene Henry both welcomed Bill Ramsey and invited him to reach out to them with any questions or needs. Gene Henry observed that he would like to learn what Muncy Borough has come up with in regard to protecting the 41% of their community from future risk. Bill Ramsey explained that Muncy is facing flood levels of 16 feet in that part of the town. They are participating in a FEMA buy out to take over the land and repurpose it. Their challenge is to figure out what to do with the land.

DISCUSSION: Gene Henry shared that his community purchased out a subdivision that was horribly flooded and partnered with a local university who had their chemistry department go in and help turn it into a regional storm water system. They were able to study plans and the chemistry department got involved to see which plans worked best to strip out nitrogen and various other pollutants that would end up in the riverine system. One of their principal rivers flooded to 20 feet, almost its highest flood level of 24 feet. He stated that there is a lot that a community can do to repurpose such land and find entities to partner with.

Tim Trautman shared that his community has done a couple of hundred buyouts over the past 12 or 13 years. As Muncy Borough works through the process, he invited Bill Ramsey to reach out with any questions or needs. He has a lot of information on the Charlotte-Mecklenburg storm water buy outs as well and some of the things they've done with the land that he would be happy to share.

Rebecca Joyce opened a discussion about how can the RNN reach out to communities that were affected by Harvey, Irma and Maria. She asked Gene Henry how they were doing in Hillsborough County and what his thoughts on current recovery were.

Gene Henry reported that his communities were doing very well compared to a lot of others. Some of their riverine system flooded and they have about 400 to 500 severely affected structures; but this is much better than Naples, Collier County, and other places; he observed that Hillsborough County was very fortunate.

FURTHER DISCUSSION: Gene Henry suggested having contact information on the RNN website. As FEMA identifies case studies and people to contact, establishing a process for somebody needing help or information on how to contact an RNN Community member would be beneficial. People need to understand that a recovery plan is needed otherwise communities are going to get bogged down in a repetitive process of flooding and rebuilding to the same or lesser standards. He shared that he is always willing to help someone in need but confessed that his time is severely limited. He suggested that offering little scope or inquiry sheets and having a week or so to work on a request before someone calls him would be very helpful.

Rebecca Joyce asked Gene Henry if he felt right now that a lot of communities in Florida have recovery plans or if that is something most of them don't have. Gene Henry shared that the State of Florida has put a lot into resilience, so they have pilots, and all coastal communities - per administrative code in Florida - are required to have redevelopment plans. Whether these plans are feasible or workable is another story and will be seen after the storms pass and recovery begins.

Gene Henry shared some thoughts on redevelopment plans pulled together in the later 2000's and long-term recovery committees set up in communities who are supposed to pull in higher redevelopment standards. He observed that we will just have to watch and see how all those communities work through

that amount of storm surge and wind damage and where they go. Hillsborough County has been working for a very long time (with peaks and valleys of effort) and has purchased a lot of coastal areas and really worked to protect them by preserving the mangroves and adding a lot of extra freeboard requirements. They do not allow certain types of housing in risk areas, for example, and though they are not the poster child yet of perfect resilience, they have been working toward it. It will be interesting to see how the rest of the Florida communities look to resilience following the disaster.

Barb Miller suggested that we encourage these long-term recovery groups to plan for the next storm, not the last one. We're seeing the increase in strength and duration of these storms, and we have to take that into consideration when doing long-term recovery planning. Southern West Virginia appreciates this because what they were hearing from government officials was different from what the community was bringing to the table. The community was saying they really don't like the regulations, but they really don't want to have to rebuild their town every time they get one of these larger storms either.

Gene Henry suggested we can advocate for pushing for the next storm and reiterating the frequency changes of these storms and their severity. He suggested this be highlighted on our website.

Tom Hughes shared regarding the recovery site, that a lot of folks think they can move the response folks in various agencies, and think that this is the first thing you want to do in recovery; when in fact many times, it's not. He stated that just because a community has always gone to a particular person at a particular agency for direction, they should instead look to see who from that agency is the right person to help them in recovery mode.

Rebecca Joyce offered that perhaps what might be helpful is putting some of these tips and ideas on the Home page of our website to help get people started, then have a way for them to fill out a little reply form, answer some basic questions or find some contact information where they can send an email to get more help on an issue they are facing. This would be a good way get the RNN more out there.

Barb Miller suggested some very good recovery plans that we could put up as examples. She saw some from Pennsylvania that Tom Hughes might have access to and suggested that Florida and some other states also may have some good ones. She shared that when you start talking about recovery plans, a lot of smaller communities are intimidated because they start thinking of rules and regulations and all of that. Whereas, if they could see some of these plans and the types of things that are in them it might help them when developing their own.

Tom Hughes offered that Ocean County, NJ, has one that was done by Michael Baker that's pretty good.

Rebecca Joyce announced that she was writing all these suggestions down.

Bill Ramsey shared that this could be very helpful with something that's coming down in their area. They received a \$250,000.00 grant from DPED in Pennsylvania using Community Block Development Funds Recovery to create what they're calling the Great Muncy Area Resilience Plan. The RPFs will go out on the County's website at the end of the month. He offered to send the scope for the plan – which is looking for a consultant to create a resilience plan for the Borough of Muncy and the parts of the town that wrap around the barrel where flooding occurs. It is expected to be a very expensive plan and probably take quite a while to organize. Some of these group suggestions would be very helpful to them, if posted on the website, once they get a consultant in place. They do have the beginnings of a steering committee started.

Rebecca Joyce agreed this was a great idea and has been added to her list. She shared that the RNN has talked in the past about how the whole concept of resiliency can be different from community to community, so getting input from other communities can be helpful because each decision is unique to the vulnerabilities the communities have.

Bill Ramsey shared that Muncy Borough has partnered with a state university to look at creating a Resilience Center of Excellence. This is planned to be housed in one of the historic buildings in the center of Muncy which also happens to be in the flood area of the town. They would then make that building a

working model of what a resilient building would look like and use it as a teaching center to teach resilience to other communities. Muncy is also partnering with other universities such as Bucknell University. Their Borough engineer is a graduate of Bucknell and Bill himself attended their Graduate program. They are trying to get higher education involved in this effort.

Rebecca Joyce shared that some of the colleges and universities in her area can be very helpful in providing students for research and internships. She agreed that getting professional academics providing technical assistance and willing to partner can be very productive.

Ed Thomas greeted the group and stated that he joined the call late and has been quietly enjoying the discussion. He offered a thought with regard to higher education, in that NHMA has an RFP out trying to loop in an institution of higher education to develop academic credentials for the DRR Curriculum. He suggested that anyone working with institutions of higher education to please bring that RFP to their attention or send a note to himself or NHMA Admin so we can forward them the information. The RFP is due in early October.

Rebecca Joyce invited Ed Thomas to report on the exciting things happening with respect to the NHMA Board Meeting held yesterday and about how we're going to try to get that out.

Ed Thomas reported that NHMA has been working very assiduously to develop the *Roadmap* document. He explained the concern that it is not yet 508 Compliant, and also not yet in Spanish. Ed Thomas explained that ever since Hurricane Harvey hit - and it's been very clear that there's a significant Hispanic population in Texas – followed by Hurricane Irma hitting in Florida, and Maria hitting parts of the Virgin Islands where there are populations that are largely Spanish speaking, and then of course Puerto Rico whose business is primarily conducted in Spanish - the need for the *Roadmap* to be available in Spanish has become urgent. He observed that NHMA has been looking for funding to get this translation done and also get it 508 Compliant. Ed Thomas reported that one of NHMA's generous Board Members came up with the money to do the translation to Spanish, and Dr. Alessandra Jerolleman has already started on that effort. She has asked Ed to work with her on some of the "wrinkles" having to do with funding, etc., for Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. They will just do some sections of re-writing the *Roadmap* in both English and Spanish.

Ed Thomas further reported that NHMA will probably do some contracting with respect to 508 Compliance of the *Roadmap* as well. In addition, Alessandra Jerolleman is talking with NHMA about doing a podcast or webinar of the *Roadmap* in Spanish, primarily for the benefit of the folks in Puerto Rico, but this could certainly be of interest in parts of Texas and the Virgin Islands as well, and of course Florida. NHMA is trying to be responsive to the post-disaster needs as best it can. He loves the idea of trying to figure out how the RNN community can do outreach without breaking anyone's back, individually, with respect offering assistance and coaching to communities who like the idea of preparing for the next storm, not the past storm. We've got a lot really wonderful thoughts there, please keep it going.

Rebecca Joyce thanked Ed Thomas and shared some of her thoughts with regard to learning about 508 Compliance, in that it has to do with the Federal level requiring all documents and publications to have a certain level of accessibility for people with disabilities, particularly visual impairments. She explained by way of example that if you have a document with a picture, a person with a visual impairment can mouse over the picture on their computer and there will be text that describes the picture, or in the case of someone who is completely blind, there will be on their computer a program that will read the description of the picture. She did not realize until all these storms that this is a fairly new requirement, within the past year or two perhaps, at the Federal level which requires all their documents to have that level of compatibility. Her district is trying with some of the things that they're doing now with NHMA to have that same level of accessibility, which is really exciting.

Ed Thomas thanked Rebecca Joyce for her explanation and added that It's certainly necessary and is something that has gotten lost in the mix. It's also something that is very much required in the academic community. As we get closer to working with some folks in the academic community, 508 Compliance is going to be critically important to having our product acceptable and in common use. This is just one thing

that we're trying to do. It also has to do with the overall tenor of NHMA trying to reach out to the folks that are the most impacted and the most disadvantaged with respect to disasters and that includes people who are visually or otherwise physically challenged.

Rebecca Joyce summarized the discussion to make sure she had noted all of the suggestions. One of the biggest things that Gene Henry spoke about was for communities to move forward with their long-term recovery, once they have that recovery plan in place, is to also be thinking in terms of (as Barb Miller put it) building for the future storm, not the current storm. There may be ways we can highlight that on our website with certain tips and advice that people need to remember. Tom Hughes mentioned how it is important for communities to remember that when you've committed to work on your recovery plan, working with the response people, that you be aware that they may not necessarily be the people that you need on your recovery committee, so take a close look at that as part of developing the plan. We could put links to existing recovery plans on the website, and Tom Hughes recommended Ocean County, NJ as a good example. Bill Ramsey also mentioned the Muncy project, that they're working to develop a Greater Muncy Area Resiliency Plan and trying to develop a Resiliency Plan of Excellence.

Rebecca Joyce observed that the first step for the RNN might be to augment our website to put up some publications, tips, links, etc. that might be helpful for communities developing their recovery plan. She mentioned Gene Henry's suggestions that we develop a little quick questionnaire for people to fill out in order to let us know what kind of help they might need so we could point them in the direction of RNN Members that might have experience in those areas. Some of the things he mentioned were things such as what type of funding might they be going after such as FEMA funding, or Block Grant funding, or what type of project it is, do they have a redevelopment plan in place, etc. Rebecca Joyce asked if she had left anything out.

Gene Henry shared that they have a facility that works with lots of communities and scientists, just for guidance. When they offer their guidance, they have a very complete mitigation team as well including engineering. He stated that since they like the RNN, and what they see, he will pass their email on and send it out later. It's nice to know that entities are out there, such as H2O, that don't mind providing guidance to communities and also pointing them to those communities under RNN that can serve as a mentor or provide further information.

Ed Thomas offered that maybe we should be asking such organizations to be institutional members or partner with NHMA and get them involved. He reminded everyone that this is an all-volunteer organization. We have extremely limited financial support for some elements of what we do – we're able to pay the NHMA Admin to take notes and help remind Ed Thomas that he's missing from the call and things like that, so as we come up with these ideas, it's going to be a question of who exactly is going to do the work, and how will we maintain answering these questions once they start flowing. We have a webmaster that we pay in part from the FEMA grant, and certainly as the RNN members come up with ideas for stuff that you want to have posted on the RNN website or the NHMA website, that's great. He cautioned everyone that somebody's going to have to do the work that we plan, and we've got to really think that through as we go along.

Ed Thomas reminded everyone that he is also an unpaid volunteer, with limited time, and that the group should not assume that once they decide on a course of action it is over to Ed Thomas to follow it up.

Tom Hughes asked for confirmation that we seem to be looking for what should be provided and what communities should perhaps look for in their first week, two to three weeks, 30 days out, 60 days out after an event.

Rebecca Joyce clarified that it's not so much immediate recovery but more long-term building back and having to build back with new standards, implementing mitigation, and things like that.

Tom Hughes asked if it would be helpful for everyone to send their thoughts in to Rebecca Joyce; Once we see what we get in, it sounds like we're looking for recovery triage for a community.

Rebecca Joyce will send an email out to everybody that wasn't on the call today and ask them for their thoughts so we can compile a list.

Tom Hughes suggested a call in two weeks to discuss this material instead of waiting a month.

Rebecca Joyce agreed and discussed the pros and cons of a bi-weekly call: everyone is maxed out and just being able to be on this call sometimes can be a struggle. But to tailor something that requires minimal time consumption, to test holding a volunteer call every two weeks to see what kind of response we get. She suggested that not everybody needs to be on every call, but this might be a simple way that we can be available for people and let them know they can call in to have a discussion on this topic as a simple start.

Tom Hughes offered a post/checklist for flooding events on what officials should be doing, that would be very helpful. If they don't do substantial damage determinations, a lot is going to be missed later on down the road in terms of opportunities to increase cost compliance access, and things like that.

Ed Thomas stated that if everyone wanted to have another call in two weeks, we can certainly set that up. He suggested getting Tom's checklist out would be very helpful.

Rebecca Joyce suggested setting up a schedule of calls and announcing that we would be available for anybody from any community to call in and talk. She suggested alternating so not everybody has to be on every call, but at least some people will be on a particular call. Calls could be limited to an hour. We could begin with this and see how it goes, have maybe three calls as a start to see what the response is. If we get a response, we can talk to people and if we don't we can stop it, but this might be a quick thing we can offer that really wouldn't entail too much work on everybody's part and might eliminate people having to need to talk to different people individually in separate calls, when we can all connect in one.

Rebecca Joyce suggested Thursday October 5th at 11:00 am for the first call.

Ed Thomas stated he is not available on that day. Rebecca Joyce will take the lead on this, NHMA Admin will be available to support. The group is to decide what they want to say and shop this around and make sure it goes out to Matt Campbell at FEMA and other folks, to know that we're hosting a round table on disaster recovery.

Tom Hughes asked if we need a Webex. Rebecca Joyce suggested just doing a conference call to keep it simple for the first one. Tom Hughes expressed concern about the number of callers that can call in. He suggested doing it as an Event Forum and have Erin Capps set that up.

Roger Faris shared that he will try to participate and at least listen in. He is still searching for good best practices stories for the NHMA website and is having a little trouble getting them from people. He shared that Barb Miller and he have been in touch about Harper's Ferry, but it looks like that's probably not going to happen due to a changing political climate. He will find out more about why that is.

Rebecca Joyce will get an email out later today and will mention the need for best practice stories. She will include his name and email and ask people can contact him. Roger Faris emphasized the importance of good news stories to shine a light on something that's smart, common sense, but also offers a nugget of information that really makes people more hopeful. He gave the example of Hull, Massachusetts, where people who read that best practices story realize that they save on their flood insurance if they go a little bit extra up in the air. The question then becomes how do you make it look good, and how do you have access, and you tie in architects and engineers that have solved that problem, then people get inspired. Ed Thomas expressed disappointment about the Harpers Ferry best practice story not going forward. He reiterated that the ABA was especially interested in that. He suggested in light of the sensitive political conditions that names don't have to be revealed, as long as the story is told.

Rebecca Joyce called for any other comments before adjourning the meeting. Ed Thomas expressed his appreciation for her leadership on this.

A Motion to adjourn was made by Tim Trautman.

The Motion was seconded by Ed Thomas.

There being no Discussion,

The Meeting was adjourned.

Next Meeting of the RNN is October 20, 2017 at 11:00 a.m.

Rebecca Joyce to be in touch with everybody and as they have thoughts, please feel free to email them out and she will compile everything into a memo so that we can capture what we talked about and gather any thoughts that people might have that aren't on the call today.

Ed Thomas and Rebecca Joyce to talk after the meeting about contractor support for the RNN and working with the NHMA webmaster to update the website. Rebecca Joyce to send the webmaster an email sometime this weekend and copy Ed Thomas and NHMA Admin.

Call ended 12:06 p.m.