

Jefferson Parish Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan 2025 Update Meeting Minutes

Hazard Mitigation Committee Meeting #1: Kickoff and Hazards

February 27, 10:00AM to 12:00PM

JEDCO Conference Center

701A Churchill Pkwy, Westwego, LA 70094

Jamelyn Trucks, project principal, opened the meeting by introducing herself and briefly going over the agenda items. She then turned the meeting over to Michelle Gonzales, Director of Ecosystem and Coastal Management, who led the group in an icebreaker activity. For eight minutes, she had participants interview the person next to them using a questionnaire she provided. Questions included those of a professional nature, such as the person's industry experience, as well as a personal nature, like what superpower they wished they had or where they would like to live for a year if they could choose anywhere. Participants ranging in experience level gave answers such as flying, super-speed, and the ability to see the future, as well as Italy and the beach. The final questions pertained to whether or not participants had been impacted by flooding or subsidence, and if they had any experience or knowledge of rain gardens or fortified roofs. Most had experienced flooding during Hurricane Katrina with little subsidence experience, and most had little to no knowledge pertaining to rain gardens or fortified roofs. Then, the partners introduced each other to the committee using their answers to the questionnaire. Ms. Gonzales concluded the exercise by pointing out how their answers may reflect some changes they'd like to see in their communities.

Mrs. Trucks then defined mitigation and offered examples of mitigation activities including elevating homes, protecting critical facilities, and informing the public of risk, as well as its impacts in that it breaks the cycle of damages, promotes community resilience, and reduces the risk to human life and safety. She explained that an approved and adopted mitigation plan is required to receive federal funding and gave a brief overview of the new mitigation guidance and requirements of climate change and equity incorporation.

She moved on to a discussion of the project itself, beginning with announcing the key objectives. These included updating the Hazard Mitigation Plan for Jefferson Parish, maintaining mitigation funding and grant eligibility, assessing critical facilities and assets, identifying potential projects, increasing public awareness and education, maintaining compliance with State and Federal requirements, maximizing CRS points, and integrating the Coastal Strategic Action Plan (CSAP). At this point, participants requested that the PowerPoint presentation be made bigger or brighter to help with visibility. The overhead lights were turned off to resolve the issue.

Mrs. Trucks then revealed the five broad project tasks, which consisted of the project and plan kick-off, parish profile and risk assessment update, mitigation strategy and action plan updates, plan maintenance and planning process updates, and complete plan review and adoption. She also announced the respective topics for all committee meetings, chronologically kickoff and hazards, problems and risk, goals and activities, actions, and draft plan review. Joe Valiente, with emergency management for Jefferson Parish via Microsoft Teams chat, raised the question of whether these would

be discussed further. Margaret Walton, CFM with AtkinsRéalis, responded via chat that these would be expounded upon in depth during future committee meetings.

Mrs. Trucks then explained the planning process consisting of reconvening the Hazard Mitigation Planning Advisory Committee, public participation and outreach to key stakeholders, data collection and analysis, and plan preparation and submission. She informed the group that document preparation will be conducted between meetings as shown on the schedule. She also announced the participants, namely Jefferson Parish, Gretna, Harahan, Kenner, Westwego, Grand Isle, and Jean Lafitte, explaining that this is what makes it a multi-jurisdictional plan. This was further emphasized when she displayed the planning advisory committee members grouped by which municipality they were representing. She then displayed the project schedule and reiterated that the committee meetings will be held on the fourth Tuesday of April, August, October, and December.

Mrs. Trucks then gave a brief overview of the Risk Assessment process, which included Hazard Identification and analysis, vulnerability assessment, and development trends and implications. She then presented the committee with a list of hazards that were identified on the last plan update, which consisted of floods, hurricanes and tropical storms, storm surge, tornadoes, coastal erosion, subsidence, hailstorms, winter storms, lightning, drought, wildfires, earthquakes, sea level rise, and extreme heat. She then asked the group if anyone had suggestions for any hazards to be added to the 2025 update. Mildred Congemi with the Planning Advisory Board gave an example of busted pipes in the area leading to sewage getting into the Mississippi River. Brandon Campo with Westwego CSRS and Mr. Valiente both suggested that saltwater intrusion be added considering recent occurrences.

Ms. Gonzales raised the idea that saltwater intrusion and sewer line breakage were directly caused by drought as a multi-hazard, and the importance of coordinating with the state plan update for guidance there. She also suggested combining extreme heat with winter storms as simply extreme weather as some other mitigation plans have done. Regarding saltwater intrusion, Mr. Valiente commented that while drought may have caused the intrusion, drought cannot be mitigated and therefore the focus should be on mitigating the intrusion itself, possibly through permanent pipelines to freshwater upriver. As for the extreme temperatures, Mrs. Walton advised keeping the two extremes separate and instead adding winter storms, freezes, or winter weather to the existing list of hazards. Ms. Gonzales agreed that adding saltwater intrusion specifically to the HM plan could be beneficial in supporting the project's previously discussed key objectives. Mr. Valiente reiterated the effects of saltwater intrusion on commerce and the workforce. Corey Miller then suggested the addition of severe fog. Mrs. Congemi and Mr. Valiente voiced a desire to add terrorist attacks to this list, but Mrs. Trucks emphasized the distinction between manmade hazards and natural hazards, the latter of which this mitigation plan is intended to encompass.

After a brief look at the previous plan update's floodplain and critical facilities maps, Mrs. Trucks handed out copies of the previous plan's capability assessments to representatives of each municipality. She asked committee members to raise their hands if they felt confident that they could update this information during this meeting, to which no members affirmed. Mrs. Trucks instead asked if they would take a moment to familiarize themselves with the document and collaborate with their municipalities to update the information in the coming weeks. Mr. Valiente asked if there was anyone on the team from code enforcement and raised the question of whether the committee should review and upgrade minimum building codes. Mrs. Walton emphasized that this would help drive the mitigation strategy.

Mrs. Trucks then asked the group if they would like to take a short break, to which they unanimously voted against in order to wrap up. Therefore, she moved into the topic of mitigation strategy, namely the goals and identification and analysis of mitigation measures. These measures included planning and regulatory, structural and infrastructure, nature systems protection, and public education and awareness. She then provided an example of a mitigation action plan which labeled its key components of the action, category, hazard, objective(s) addressed, background, priority, funding source(s), responsibility, and completion date. She also presented what the action plan looked like in the previous plan update for Jefferson Parish.

She then shared the plan maintenance process, specifically emphasizing the ability to continually update it through the web-based format of the new plan. She also highlighted documentation being a key component of the planning process, specifically the full description of the planning process, the plan adoption, and the local mitigation plan “review tool”.

Mrs. Trucks then explained the Roles and Responsibilities of the AtkinsRéalís team, namely technical assistance, data collection and analysis, facilitation of advisory committee meetings, workshops and open public meetings, and plan preparation. As for the advisory committee, their responsibilities included active participation in the planning process, including data collection and exchange, determining current capabilities, public awareness and stakeholder involvement, mitigation strategy development, plan review and feedback, and required training. Maggie Talley, Director of Floodplain Management and Hazard Mitigation, explained that this required training would specifically include completion of the annual ethics training by the end of the year as a council appointed committee. Mrs. Trucks then emphasized the importance for committee members unable to attend in person or via Microsoft Teams to provide a designee to meet the key objective of maximizing CRS points. Other responsibilities of the advisory committee included plan adoption and project management.

Moving on to public involvement, she explained that there will be a standalone public project website, the committee meetings will be open to the public, a public survey will be provided to those in attendance, and their help was requested to identify any additional external stakeholders.

Regarding the next steps for the project, Mrs. Trucks announced the coming dissemination of a public participation survey once the project website is up, as well as the request for data collection from committee members, namely risk and capability assessments. She then reminded the group of the upcoming meetings including the first public meeting on March 21, as well as the next committee meeting on April 23 at the JEDCO Conference Center. Ms. Gonzales pointed out that the address for the public meeting was incorrect on the presentation, to which Mrs. Trucks apologized and informed the group that she will send out an updated address. Mrs. Gonzales then explained that the public outreach meetings will be in partnership with the local library’s adult services program to inform the public about relevant hazards and things they can do to help mitigate them. She emphasized the team’s goal of going above and beyond the federal minimum requirements through this effort. She also clarified that committee members are not required to attend the public outreach meetings but are welcome and encouraged to do so.

Mrs. Trucks then opened the floor for questions. Mrs. Congemi suggested reaching out to Guaranteed Restoration and/or their partner Hatching Hope for their expertise in providing support after-the-fact during disasters. Finally, Mrs. Trucks thanked the group for their attendance and adjourned the meeting.