

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

Public Meeting #1: Earthquakes and Tornadoes

March 21, 2024, 3:00PM to 4:30PM

Edith S. Lawson Library

635 Fourth St, Westwego, LA 70094

Maggie Talley, Director of Floodplain Management and Hazard Mitigation, began the meeting by welcoming everyone and providing an overview of the purpose of the meeting. She then introduced Jamelyn Trucks, project principal, who would be leading the group with a presentation of an overview of the planning process. She began with a recap of the first committee meeting, held on February 27, and the purposes it served. She then provided the group with an overview of the agenda, which included time for questions and discussion as well as a trivia contest. She encouraged attendees to stay and participate in these activities.

Mrs. Trucks began the overview by defining mitigation, emphasizing the key aspects of people and property, and the actions taken before-hand to reduce the risk to them. She also highlighted the education and outreach component of hazard mitigation, clarifying that this was the purpose of the current meeting. She also explained the legal requirements of an updated hazard mitigation plan and its relevant statutes. She informed the group of the key objectives of the plan update, highlighting that the committee would be taking a closer look at climate change and equity, specifically. Mrs. Trucks greatly emphasized the importance of community feedback throughout this process, sharing with attendees the QR code links to the public website and survey. Several attendees took photos and wrote down the URLs, and Mrs. Trucks offered physical copies for anyone that needed them. She also promised that the presentation slides would be made available on the website later. Mrs. Trucks also explained the importance of maximizing CRS points in order for the municipalities to possibly receive reductions in flood insurance. She then showed attendees where they can go on the website to suggest any external stakeholders, as well as identifying the Jefferson Parish representatives in attendance who would receive comments directly.

Next, Mrs. Trucks identified the five tasks of the planning process and identified the current status as in the data collection phase. She emphasized the current plan's expiration date of June 2025, and the subsequent need to stay on track with this schedule. She shared with attendees that the next public meeting, which will include a draft of the plan, will be held in January of 2025.

When discussing the hazards included on the existing plan, Mrs. Trucks gave an example of the increase in tornadoes the area has seen since the last plan update as a note-worthy change in the new plan. She asked if anyone had any hazard-related questions, and no hands were raised. Michelle Gonzales, Director of Ecosystem and Coastal Management, then asked if anyone had suggestions for hazards that should be added to the list. Robert Billiot, Mayor of Westwego, brought up the main line water breakage due to subsidence and extreme temperature changes the city has been facing recently. Royce J. Blanchard, a representative of councilwoman Jennifer Van Vrancken, offered the suggestion of including saltwater intrusion. Ms. Gonzales explained the idea currently being questioned of whether saltwater intrusion

should be included as a separate hazard or as a section within the hazard(s) that caused it. She clarified that it should only be separated if Jefferson Parish is at risk for saltwater intrusion without drought or extreme temperatures.

Mayor Billiot added that installation of permanent lines up-river is a possible solution in the future, expounding upon the impacts to the shipping industry. He also echoed the increased frequency of tornadoes in the area as well as the historically unusual paths they have taken. Regarding previously mentioned data analysis, Lisa Valence, with the City of Westwego, questioned whether the committee is analyzing equity of hazards or simply the effects of them on the parish, to which Mrs. Trucks affirmed the latter.

Ms. Gonzales then asked the group if they were experiencing subsidence and/or soil sinking rapidly, to which she received unanimous confirmation, specifically exemplified in the shifting of sidewalks. She asked whether the effects were being experienced more by the river or expressway, to which Ophelia Walker of Avondale answered with the swamp land by the river. Ms. Gonzales requested suggestions for possible solutions, which several attendees provided. Mayor Billiot explained the possibility that subsidence may be partially caused by the over pumping of the water table, specifically at the sewage main line pumping stations. He emphasized how simply filling the nearby holes in the road with asphalt could put pressure on the pipes below and cause a greater problem. He explained that the City of Westwego has been searching for funding to close off the canal but has been unsuccessful in getting anyone to visit the site to investigate the issue. Mr. Blanchard then brought up land subsidence in the Stonebridge subdivision and suggested more extensive soil testing, which Mrs. Trucks summarized with a potential need for increased or revised building codes and standards. She also brought up the potential for adding green infrastructure, which received a chorus of agreement from the attendees.

At that point, Mrs. Trucks opted to sacrifice some of the remaining overview content in favor of audience participation and good, helpful conversation with the community members present. Subsequently, she gave a brief overview of capability and risk assessments, mitigation measures, the importance of innovation using new tools and technology, and building relationships between public and private entities. At that point, Mayor Billiot interjected that the City of Westwego could use more of those relationships with private nonprofit entities to secure funding to which Mrs. Trucks suggested reaching out to BRIC.

After opting to breeze through elevation and flood risk reduction due to the area's familiarity, Mrs. Trucks asked about the effectiveness of warning systems in the area. Mrs. Walker responded with an emphatic no, suggesting that the area needs a siren system for tornadoes and even for chemical warnings since the area contains so many chemical plants. She emphasized the need for a warning system that doesn't rely on communications systems like cell phones in the event that those go down in an emergency.

Mrs. Walker also suggested that the parish should advertise more for the next public meeting, as she had only heard about it that same day on the twelve o'clock news. Mrs. Talley gave a list of the means used for promotion for this meeting and asked for any specific suggestions. Mr. Blanchard suggested potentially utilizing the JP Alert platform for this. Mrs. Walker clarified by suggesting the need for more physical outreach as opposed to web-based promotion in order to provide a more detailed explanation and encourage people to attend. She suggested that the parish reach out to the local civic associations, which the rest of the attendees verbalized agreement as the public has a very strong involvement there.

Ms. Gonzales then asked for suggestions for Critical Facilities in the area that attendees believe should be assessed. Mrs. Trucks offered the suggestion of circulating the list of those assessed in the last plan update. For clarification, Ms. Gonzales gave an example of new AC units not being held to the same post-Hurricane Katrina standards.

Mrs. Trucks then led the group through several trivia questions regarding earthquakes and tornadoes, in which all attendees participated. Finally, Mrs. Trucks adjourned the meeting, and all were thanked for their participation.