

1.0 THE PLANNING PROCESS

To develop this multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigation plan, Knox County utilized a comprehensive whole community planning process. This included participation from stakeholders representing the county, municipalities, townships, community organizations, and residents. This section describes the process used to develop the hazard mitigation plan and explains how stakeholders and the community were included throughout.

1.1 PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Knox County's mitigation planning process began in July 2019 and concluded with the submission of a revised plan for state review and federal approval on March 30, 2020. The plan development process included five phases: pre-update planning, project kick-off, risk and vulnerability assessment, mitigation strategy development, and final plan review.

1.1.1 Pre-Update Planning

Knox County's existing hazard mitigation plan had an expiration date of May 21, 2020. The EMA Director submitted a grant application through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program on July 24, 2018 seeking funding to update the plan. The grant was awarded in May 2019, enabling Knox County to proceed with the planning process.

Resource Solutions Associates LLC was hired in July 2019 to lead the planning process. The EMA Director and Consultant met to establish a project timeline, review planning requirements, and identify local reference documents to incorporate in the plan. The Consultant collaborated with the EMA Director to develop a contact list for the new mitigation planning team; this list was based on the contact list used in 2014 and updated to include current officials and additional partners and community organizations. EMA Directors from adjacent counties were also included and invited to participate in the planning process.

1.1.2 Plan Maintenance Activities, 2015 – 2019

Following adoption of the 2015 hazard mitigation plan, Knox County conducted annual plan review sessions with stakeholders to assess progress on hazard mitigation efforts. Annual review sessions were conducted in 2016, 2017, and 2018. During these sessions, planning team members reviewed mitigation strategies, documented progress, and discussed hazard events that occurred during the year. This feedback was summarized in annual reports which are included in Appendix B of this plan.

1.1.3 Project Kick Off

The planning team's work began with a countywide planning meeting on September 25, 2019. During this meeting, which was held at the Central Ohio Technical College campus in Mount Vernon, the Consultant and EMA Director presented an overview of the project and discussed requirements and timelines with stakeholders. Attendees included jurisdiction representatives, local government officials, and other community stakeholders. During the meeting,

stakeholders also participated in a hazard assessment survey to identify the hazards that affect their jurisdiction and the range of damages they experience.

1.1.4 Risk and Vulnerability Assessment

The risk and vulnerability assessment phase focused on research and information gathering. Jurisdiction-specific work sessions were conducted to identify local vulnerability and analyze the impact of incidents on each jurisdiction. In October 2019, the Consultant and EMA Director met with individual jurisdictions to discuss hazard vulnerability and critical infrastructure protection needs. Participants provided input regarding critical assets and infrastructure, areas with specific or heightened risk or vulnerability, and areas where mitigation actions would have a positive effect on future disaster loss. These discussions included vulnerabilities within the specific jurisdiction and Knox County as a whole. Participants included mayors, administrators, city/village council members, trustees, fiscal officers, road/street department employees, law enforcement officials, fire service personnel, public works and utility employees, and other key employees. Representatives from regional planning, natural resources, public health, education, and healthcare also participated.

1.1.5 Mitigation Strategy Development

Mitigation strategy sessions focused on developing mitigation goals and strategies for each jurisdiction. Throughout November and December 2019 and January 2020, the Consultant and EMA Director held a second work session with jurisdictions to update the mitigation strategies from the 2015 plan and develop new strategies that reflected current risks and vulnerabilities. The strategy development discussion also addressed priority, timeline, and lead agency for the identified strategies.

1.1.6 Final Plan Review

After completing the hazard identification and risk assessment and developing mitigation strategies, the complete draft plan was shared with the planning team and the community for review. A final countywide plan review meeting was held on February 25, 2020. This meeting was attended by planning team members representing jurisdictions, stakeholders, and partners across Knox County and was open to the public. During the meeting, the Consultant explained the plan's structure and organization and discussed formal plan adoption and ongoing plan maintenance.

Table 1-1 includes a complete list of planning team meetings and work sessions conducted throughout the planning process.

Table 1-1: Planning Team Meetings

Date	Location	Purpose	Participating Jurisdictions
09/25/19	Central Ohio Technical College, Mt Vernon	Project Kick Off and Hazard Identification	Countywide Meeting Centerburg Fredericktown Gambier Knox County Mount Vernon
10/22/19	Mount Vernon Fire Department	Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment	Mount Vernon Knox County
10/23/19	Centerburg Village Hall	Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment	Centerburg
10/24/19	Kokosing Training Center, Fredericktown	Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment	Fredericktown
10/24/19	Memorial Building, Mount Vernon	Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment	Countywide Meeting Knox County
10/30/19	Gambier Community Center	Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment	Gambier
10/30/19	Gann Village Hall	Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment	Gann/Brinkhaven
11/26/19	Kokosing Training Center, Fredericktown	Mitigation Strategy Development	Fredericktown Kokosing Construction
11/26/19	Gambier Community Center	Mitigation Strategy Development	Gambier
11/26/19	Mount Vernon Fire Department	Mitigation Strategy Development	Mount Vernon
12/03/19	East Knox Fire Department, Danville	Hazard/Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategy Development	Danville Union Township
12/09/19	Gann Village Hall	Mitigation Strategy Development	Gann/Brinkhaven
01/15/20	Central Ohio Technical College, Mt Vernon	Mitigation Strategy Development	Countywide Meeting Knox County Centerburg Gambier
01/15/20	Martinsburg Village Hall	Hazard/Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategy Development	Martinsburg
02/25/20	Central Ohio Technical College, Mt Vernon	Final Plan Review	Countywide Meeting Knox County Danville Fredericktown Gambier Mount Vernon

1.2 STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

To encourage countywide participation in the mitigation plan, a large group of stakeholders were invited to participate in the planning process. Invitations to participate in the Hazard Mitigation Planning Team were extended to more than 140 individuals representing the following Knox County partners:

- Incorporated jurisdictions (county, city, and village officials)
- Township representatives (trustees, fiscal officers)
- Specialized disciplines, including floodplain management, fire service, law enforcement, engineering, utilities, public health, healthcare, hospitals, education, nonprofits, and social service agencies
- Elected and appointed officials, including the county commissioners, auditor, treasurer, engineer, and regional planning
- Economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, and tourism bureaus
- Emergency management officials from adjacent counties (Ashland, Coshocton, Delaware, Holmes, Licking, Morrow, and Richland)
- Non-government agencies and community action groups
- Special interest groups such as watershed coalitions, conservancy districts, federal partners, and state agencies with facilities in the county
- Residents, businesses, and the general public

Throughout the planning process, more than 75 people contributed by attending work sessions and providing crucial information and feedback. The complete list of participating stakeholders is provided in Appendix A: Mitigation Planning Team. The planning team's participation occurred over the four phases of plan development previously described in this section.

When scheduling meetings and work sessions, the EMA considered a variety of schedules, work situations, and other issues. Most meeting invitations were sent via e-mail because this is the most efficient and widely utilized communication method. When necessary, the EMA Director reached out to stakeholders by phone, regular mail, or other communication mechanisms to ensure delivery of the information. The EMA and Consultant worked diligently to maintain a list of participants so those who had not yet been involved could be identified. The EMA Director reached out directly to any jurisdictions and key stakeholders who did not respond to other methods of communication.

1.2.1 Jurisdiction Participation

The incorporated jurisdictions in Knox County all elected to participate in the countywide mitigation plan. The only exception is the village of Utica, which is located primarily in Licking County. Because only a small section of the village falls within Knox County, the village aligns with Licking County for emergency planning purposes, including the hazard mitigation plan. Townships were invited and encouraged to participate in all planning activities. The officials identified in table 1-2 served as the primary representative and point of contact for their jurisdiction.

Table 1-2: Participating Jurisdictions and Primary Representatives

Jurisdiction	Position/Title	Representative
COUNTY		
Knox County	EMA Director	Mark Maxwell
MUNICIPALITIES		
Centerburg	Village Administrator	Joe Hardin
Danville	Village Council/Mayor Elect	Joe Mazzari
Fredericktown	Village Administrator	Bruce Snell
Gambier	Village Administrator	RC Wise
Gann/Brinkhaven	Mayor	Josh Moreland
Martinsburg	Mayor	David DeNune
Mount Vernon	Fire Chief	Chad Christopher

1.2.2 Public Participation

In addition to jurisdiction representatives, county officials, and community partners, the public was also invited to participate in mitigation meetings and work sessions. News releases were sent to local media for the kick off and final plan review meetings. Jurisdiction representatives were encouraged to invite additional employees, partners, and community members to participate and to promote the sessions to the community by sharing information on websites, social media accounts, and others available means.

Upon completion of the plan, a public review period was conducted from February 24 – March 8, 2020. During this time, the plan was posted on the Consultant’s website and accessible to all stakeholders, planning team members, and the community. A printed copy of the plan was available at the Knox County EMA. The public was notified of the review period through notifications sent to planning team participants, letters to jurisdictions, and a news release to local media outlets. All notifications included a link to view the plan online, the timeline for public review, and instructions for submitting comments and questions. Jurisdictions were encouraged to share plan review information on their websites and social media accounts.

Within the public review period, a countywide plan review forum was held on February 25, 2020. This forum was open to all jurisdictions, planning team participants, and the general public. The forum provided stakeholders with the opportunity to view and comment on the plan and discuss multi-jurisdictional implementation of the identified mitigation strategies.

All comments received from the public review period and plan review forum were reviewed by the EMA Director and Consultant. As appropriate, revisions were incorporated into the plan. After final revisions, the plan was submitted to the Ohio EMA for state review before submission to FEMA for federal approval. Following federal approval, the formal adoption process began. This process is explained in section 4.0 Plan Adoption.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Multiple information sources were used in the research and development of this plan. Research also involved extensive discussions with stakeholders, subject matter experts, and community leaders to obtain information about the Knox County community. The county profile was developed based on various county and jurisdiction documents that addressed community development, business and industry, land use regulations, and community life. Demographic and statistical information came from the U.S. Census Bureau and other government sources. The Knox County Comprehensive Plan provided information about community growth and development conditions and goals. Municipalities provided local jurisdictional documents and websites that confirmed and explained collaboration between jurisdictions and the county. Watershed and natural resource documents provided information about local rivers, creeks, and streams.

The plan incorporates local disaster history and hazard occurrences through October 2019, which is the most current information available from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Storm Events Database. Additional hazard information was provided by the Ohio Emergency Management Agency, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Tornado History Project, Stanford University Dam Program, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and other federal, state, and private sources.

The vulnerability analysis and risk assessment utilize information from multiple sources. HAZUS projections were used to develop loss estimates for floods and earthquakes. FEMA records of federal disaster assistance provided in the county and the 2019 Ohio Enhanced Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan Draft provided additional data and information. Agriculture industry value and loss information came from United States Department of Agriculture records and watershed reports and information from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Agency were consulted. Table 1-3 identifies the references, reports, and studies utilized in plan development.

Table 1-3: Studies, Reports, and References

Document	Author/Agency	Date
American Fact Finder	US Census Bureau	2020
Federal Disaster Declaration Statistics	FEMA	2020
Fredericktown Downtown Revitalization Plan	Fredericktown Community Development Foundation	2017
HAZUS Earthquake and Flood data	Ohio EMA	2018
Knox County Community Health Assessment	Knox County Health Department	2018
Knox County Comprehensive Plan 2018 Update	Knox County Regional Planning Office	2018
Knox County Profile	Ohio Department of Development, Office of Research	2018
Kokosking Scenic River Watershed Plan	Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Natural Areas and Preserves	2004
Mount Vernon Downtown Plan (not finalized)	Mount Vernon Development Company	2019
Mount Vernon Source Water Assessment and Protection Plan	Mount Vernon	2012
Mount Vernon Stormwater Management Plan	Mount Vernon	2014
State of Ohio Hazard Mitigation Plan Draft	Ohio EMA	2019
Storm Events Database	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	2020
United States Census Quick Facts	US Census Bureau	2020

1.4 PLAN MAINTENANCE

Plan maintenance is a critical component of hazard mitigation planning. Plan maintenance activities incorporate hazard mitigation considerations into ongoing community development activities, help the EMA to engage stakeholders in issues related to disaster risk reduction on a long-term basis, and streamlines the mitigation plan update process. The Knox County EMA will continue to lead mitigation plan maintenance efforts, as they did between the 2015 and 2020 hazard mitigation plans.

1.4.1 Annual Plan Maintenance Activities

Following approval of this plan, Knox County will continue the plan maintenance process that was put in place following approval of the 2015 plan. This process focuses on an annual meeting of stakeholders and jurisdiction representatives to discuss progress on mitigation strategies, recent disaster incidents and damages, and changing community needs. Feedback from stakeholders is summarized in an annual mitigation report.

Because it can be difficult to obtain participation in meetings, the EMA may choose to collect feedback from stakeholders through alternate methods including, but not limited to, digital or paper surveys, conference calls, and webinars. These methods may be utilized if the EMA feels

they will receive more robust feedback than a traditional meeting and can be used in addition to or in place of the annual review meeting.

At any point that the county or jurisdictions have been impacted by a disaster incident, the EMA will consider a special post-incident meeting with affected stakeholders to capture relevant mitigation information and document necessary changes for the next plan update. Additionally, the EMA will review the hazard identification and risk assessment and document any changes to the hazard list, incident history, and significant community development changes or challenges.

1.4.2 Community Participation

The EMA is the lead agency for coordinating mitigation plan maintenance but stakeholder and community participation are necessary to make that a robust process. The EMA will continue to include a broad group of stakeholders and community members in ongoing mitigation activities. This group will include the mitigation planning team, jurisdiction representatives, community partners, and the public.

To encourage participation from the community, all mitigation review meetings will be open to the public. The EMA will promote these events through news releases, websites, social media posts, and other appropriate means. Any digital surveys used during the review will also be made available for community comment. The EMA will review any feedback received from the public and maintain documentation of community participation in the process.

1.4.3 Integration with Community Planning Mechanisms

In Knox County, several entities collaborate to promote community and economic development for the betterment of Knox County. These agencies worked collaboratively to implement Knox County's 2015 mitigation plan and will continue to support and encourage implementation of hazard mitigation strategies.

Following adoption of the 2015 mitigation plan, the Knox County EMA worked with stakeholders to encourage progress on hazard mitigation and incorporate mitigation strategies into community planning documents. The 2018 update to the county's comprehensive plan included multiple references to the hazard mitigation plan and emphasizes responsible land use and preservation of natural resources, a continuation of the county's 2015 mitigation strategies. Like the mitigation plan, the comprehensive plan was developed by stakeholders across the county and included opportunities for public participation. Key stakeholders involved in the plan included zoning inspectors, economic development leaders, county engineer, public health, elected officials, park district leaders, and natural resource organizations. Because the comprehensive plan addresses so many issues related to disaster risk and hazard mitigation, this process emphasized the importance of the hazard mitigation plan and helped the county incorporate mitigation issues in other key planning documents.

Annual mitigation planning meetings were another key community planning activity that occurred between adoption of the 2015 hazard mitigation plan and development of the 2020

plan. The EMA Director diligently communicated with stakeholders and the public throughout the 5-year planning cycle to encourage implementation of mitigation strategies and to assess progress. Every year, he conducted a formal mitigation planning session that was open to all stakeholders and community members. During these sessions, each mitigation strategy was reviewed and changing hazards and vulnerabilities were discussed. A complete record of these sessions is included in Appendix B: Annual Reports. These sessions were key to consistently addressing hazard mitigation in Knox County and led to significant progress on the 2015 mitigation strategies. Moving forward with the 2020 plan, the EMA intends to continue this annual mitigation planning process.

In addition to the EMA's efforts, additional agencies in Knox County have key roles in community planning and implementation of hazard mitigation strategies. The Knox Regional Planning Commission is responsible for administering the county's subdivision regulations, floodplain regulations, and airport zoning regulations; the commission also works with township to amend and maintain zoning regulations and coordinate the county's comprehensive land use planning process. While this important planning process includes robust involvement from partners across Knox County, the planning commission serves as the coordinating agency for the project. This plan was most recently updated in 2018.

Multiple agencies are involved in Knox County's economic development. The Knox County Area Development Foundation assists businesses seeking to locate or expand in Knox County in finding appropriate property, financing, and workforce for their business. The foundation also participates in the Knox County Land Bank to clean up vacant and blighted properties throughout the county. The Knox County Chamber of Commerce represents businesses and seeks to promote leadership and trade among the business community. The Ariel Foundation is a private foundation that promotes arts, culture, and health in the community and seeks to help balance community preservation with revitalization efforts.

Through the work of these organizations and the efforts of county and jurisdiction officials, community development occurs. The EMA supports community development by collaborating with local officials and participating in committees and workgroups. The EMA Director incorporates disaster preparedness and hazard mitigation issues in development practices by engaging with development organizations and partners. The EMA also collaborates with partners across the county to plan and prepare for disasters, including public safety organizations, schools and educational institutions, social service agencies, and others. The EMA serves as Knox County's primary voice on these issues to the county commissioners and jurisdictions across the county.

1.4.4 Documentation of Plan Maintenance

All plan maintenance activities will be documented and maintained by the EMA. Documentation will include attendance records, stakeholder and planning team contact information, surveys, and any progress reports or damage information submitted by jurisdictions. This information will be shared with the planning team during the next plan update cycle.

1.4.5 Plan Update Cycle

The Knox County Hazard Mitigation Plan will expire in 2025. To ensure the county is prepared to submit an updated plan prior to this expiration date, efforts to update the plan will begin in mid-2023. The EMA Director will ensure that the appropriate and necessary steps are taken to complete this process.