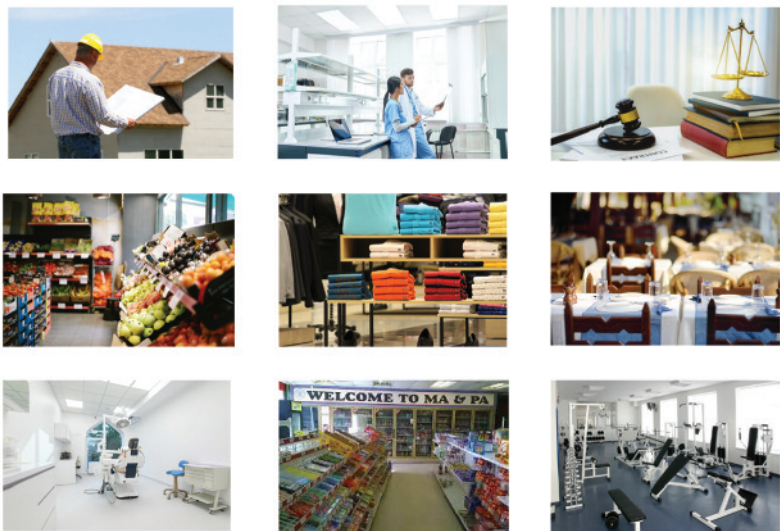


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FLOOD PREPARATION AND MITIGATION — THE DOWNINGTOWN MODEL



DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

By Barry Cassidy

The Hurricane Ida flooding in Downingtown was some of the worst residents saw. Many of the churches and service organizations contacted Mayor Phil Dague and asked him to lead the effort to be prepared for the next flood when it comes. He established a common understanding of risk-informed planning and decision-making fundamentals to help Downingtown examine a hazard or threat and produce an integrated, coordinated, and synchronized plan. The emphasis would be on representing and engaging the whole community — including those with access and functional needs, children, household pets, and service animals.

He sought to provide a systematic way to think through the life cycle of a potential crisis, determining required capabilities and establishing a framework for roles and responsibilities. It shapes how a community envisions and shares a desired outcome, selects effective ways to achieve it, and communicates expected results.

The residents and business owners have a critical role and shared responsibility to take appropriate actions to protect themselves, their families and organizations, as well as their properties. Planning that engages and includes the whole community is the focal point for building a collaborative and resilient community.

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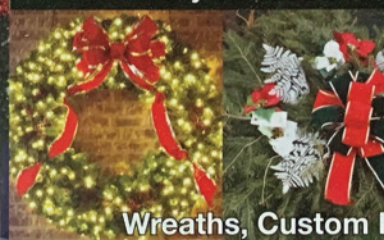
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The committee started by establishing The Downingtown Resilience Fund. The fund is organized to aid and relieve human suffering caused by a natural or civil disaster or an emergency hardship. It is a charity in its most basic form. It will be a central point for contributions to be distributed to those impacted by the floods. They established the area as Downingtown, Caln, and East Caln, constituting the sub-catchment area.

The appropriate aid type depends on the individual's needs and resources. Immediately following a devastating flood, a family may need food, clothing, and shelter, regardless of their financial resources. However, they may not require long-term assistance without adequate financial resources. Individuals who are financially needy or otherwise distressed are appropriate recipients of long-term assistance.

Financial need and distress may arise through a variety of circumstances.

Aid is considered for individuals and families who are:

- Temporarily in need of food or shelter when stranded, injured, or lost because of a disaster.
- In need of longer-term assistance with housing, childcare, or educational expenses.
- In need of counseling because of

trauma experienced as a result of a disaster.

Disaster assistance may also be provided to businesses to achieve the following charitable purposes:

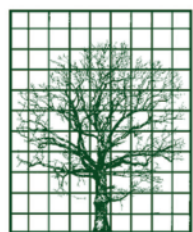
- To aid individual business owners who are financially needy or otherwise distressed.
- To augment government funding.
- To aid in restoring the Downingtown area's overall well being.

The group then established the neighborhood model for disaster response. Current disaster recovery models are often planned, executed, and staffed by individuals without specific knowledge of the most marginalized populations in a disaster area. At the same time, communities are often undervalued or ignored in favor of one-size-fits-all disaster strategies.

Recovery efforts will be led by the community-based nonprofit "Downingtown Strong." This organization is already connected to neighborhood survivors and is naturally situated to lead to:

1. Take on more responsibility to assist one another.
2. Share information.
3. Reinforce opinions on recovery strategies throughout the disaster recovery process.

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4. Allow state and local government officials to learn about community needs.

5. Disseminate supplies and information.

6. Design recovery and mitigation strategies concerning flood map revisions.

7. Integrate with municipal disaster response to maximize the benefits of both.

8. Education and training to be provided to recovery workers, allowing them to gain credibility among community members.

9. Be recognized as a major asset in ensuring shelter and care for displaced survivors during post-disaster recovery.

This local model merging donation funding with a use determined by the community that includes a program delivery will enable the Borough to control their destiny. The mayor also sits on the Flood Committee, which has partnered with Caln and East Caln Townships to develop a mitigation plan to serve the area.

Only through combined efforts and citizen action will these kinds of disasters serve the community's interest. FEMA

offers training classes, and a cadre of people in the area will take the training to enable people to navigate the system.

I sat in the council meeting when people came in and cried because the FEMA process hampered them. In my work, I found that the FEMA process is somewhat daunting. I do service delivery for a living, and when I am perplexed about the path to recovery, I know it isn't easy.

I am not saying that FEMA is bad, but the rules and regulations are complex. I had to request the manual to understand what was happening fully. Funding opens and closes, and it is easy to become confused.

Downingtown will most likely have another catastrophic flood in the next ten years. I have seen three in 20 years as a resident. Having people trained and mechanisms in place to be implemented on a local level will make the flood response more targeted and more fruitful to those impacted.

Barry Cassidy is a freelance grant and economic development consultant. He can be reached at barrycassidy@comcast.net.

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