

1.0 THE PLANNING PROCESS

To develop a natural hazard mitigation plan that reflects Mercer County's true hazards, risks, and vulnerabilities, the Mercer County EMA utilized a comprehensive, whole community planning process that involved jurisdictions and stakeholders from across the county. This section describes the process utilized to develop the plan and explains how stakeholders and the community were included throughout the plan development process.

1.1 PLAN DEVELOPMENT

From the outset of the project, the EMA understood that development of the mitigation plan would be a twelve to eighteen-month process. This timeframe was necessary to administer the grant, research hazards and risks, develop mitigation strategies and actions, include jurisdictions and stakeholders in the planning process, and complete the state and federal plan review process prior to adoption. Each phase of plan development included specific activities and steps, as described below.

1.1.1 Pre-Update Planning Process

Mercer County's most recent mitigation plan was adopted on December 26, 2006 and expired in late 2011. The county began an internal plan update process in 2012 but was ultimately unable to complete the project due to staffing restrictions and changes in the plan requirements. In 2015, the county re-engaged in the process when they applied for and were awarded a Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant (PDM). Mercer County EMA submitted an application to PDM in mid-2015 through the Ohio Emergency Management Agency. The application identified the jurisdictions in Mercer County that would participate in the planning process. Discussions with jurisdiction officials ensued, garnering their willingness to participate in the update of the county's mitigation plan. Letters of intent to participate were received from all jurisdictions and included in the grant application. On January 15, 2016, Mercer County received notification that their PDM application had been approved for funding.

Upon award of the grant, Mercer County EMA completed the approved procurement process to identify a contractor to manage the plan update process. In March 2016, the county entered into a contract Resource Solutions Associates, LLC to coordinate the project, work with jurisdictions and stakeholders to collect information, and develop the new plan.

On February 24, 2016, the Mercer County EMA Director met with Ohio EMA Mitigation Branch staff to review the requirements for plan development. The EMA and Contractor met on March 30, 2016 to develop a project timeline. The timeline began with an initial planning meeting in early summer 2016 and culminated with a completed plan submitted to Ohio EMA and FEMA for review in the summer of 2017. This timeline would allow Mercer County to have an approved plan in place by the end of 2017.

1.1.2 Planning Team Meetings

Upon completion of all necessary grant agreements, contracts, and administrative requirements, the Contractor coordinated with EMA staff to develop an initial list of planning team members. This list included representatives from all jurisdictions and a broad range of community organizations and agencies. The complete list of invited stakeholders is included as table 1-3 later in this section. This whole community-based Hazard Mitigation Planning Team met multiple times and in multiple configurations throughout the planning process. These meetings were conducted in four distinct phases: project introduction, hazard identification and risk assessment, mitigation strategy development, and plan review.

Project Kick Off

The initial planning meeting was held June 21, 2016 at the Mercer County Administrative Services Building. The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the project to stakeholders and jurisdictions and provide the planning team with an overview of the planning process. The Contractor explained the importance of the hazard mitigation plan and the process by which the EMA and Contractor would work with jurisdictions and stakeholders to develop the plan.

Hazard and Risk Identification Work Sessions

The hazard and risk identification phase focused on research and information gathering. Work sessions were conducted in October 2016 with officials and representatives from each jurisdiction to discuss hazards, risks, vulnerabilities, and past disasters. These jurisdiction meetings focused on identifying the relevant hazards and risks and discussing the impact of disaster on each jurisdiction. Participants included mayors, administrators, city/village council members, trustees, fiscal officers, road/street department employees, law enforcement officials, fire service personnel, water and wastewater treatment facility staff, and other key jurisdiction employees. Local school districts, businesses, and residents were also invited to participate and provide feedback.

Focused group meetings were also conducted with stakeholders representing specific groups or interests, including agriculture, regional planning, economic development, engineering, infrastructure, and GIS. The purpose of these meetings was to gather detailed information from stakeholders with specific expertise in these subjects. The sessions focused on gathering hazard and risk information and discussing the impact of disasters relative to each group's specific area of expertise.

Mitigation Strategy Development Work Sessions

A second round of jurisdiction-level meetings was conducted in March 2017. These sessions focused on identifying and developing mitigation goals and strategies based on the hazards and risks identified during the previous sessions. These meetings included the same broad scope of invitees as the hazard and risk identification meetings and provided a forum for local officials and residents to discuss specific actions to help reduce disaster risk in their community. These sessions also included a discussion on the mitigation strategies identified in Mercer County's 2006 plan and any progress or status updates to those items.

Final Plan Review

Following extensive input from the meetings and work sessions, the Contractor developed a draft plan for the planning team to review. Jurisdictions and stakeholders were provided with electronic access to the plan through the Contractor's website and were asked to provide feedback. Planning team members were asked to submit their feedback through the form provided on the website or by email directly to the Contractor. A printed copy of the draft plan was available at the Mercer County EMA for anyone with limited computer access.

Following the planning team's review, a two-week public review period was conducted. From June 12 - 26, 2017, the plan was available electronically on the Contractor's website and in print form at the EMA for any member of the public to review and provide comment. A public review forum was held June 12, 2017 to provide stakeholders and the community with the opportunity to review and discuss the plan in person with the Contractor and EMA staff. The public was notified of the plan review period through news releases to local media outlets, letters to jurisdictions, posts on the EMA's website and social media accounts, and flyers and notices in county office buildings. Additionally, the EMA published a paid legal advertisement in *The Daily Standard* (Celina) on June 15, 2017. All news releases and notices included locations where the plan could be viewed electronically or in print as well as contact information for the Contractor and EMA staff.

The EMA Director reviewed all comments and questions received from stakeholders and the public; appropriate revisions were incorporated into the plan. After final revisions were complete, the plan was submitted to the Ohio EMA Mitigation Branch for state review. Upon state and federal approval, the formal adoption process began. This process explained in section 4.0 Plan Adoption.

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/Audience
03/30/2016	Mercer County EMA	Meeting between EMA staff and contractor to outline project
06/21/2016	Mercer County Administration Building	Project Kick Off/Initial Planning Meeting
10/26/2016	Celina City Hall	Celina Jurisdiction Meeting #1 – Hazard and Risk Identification
10/26/2016	Fort Recovery Village Hall	Fort Recovery Jurisdiction Meeting #1 – Hazard and Risk Identification
10/26/2016	Montezuma Village Hall	Montezuma Jurisdiction Meeting #1 – Hazard and Risk Identification
10/26/2016	Rockford Village Hall	Rockford Jurisdiction Meeting #1 – Hazard and Risk Identification
10/27/2016	Chickasaw Village Hall	Chickasaw Jurisdiction Meeting #1 – Hazard and Risk Identification

Date	Location	Purpose/Audience
10/27/2016	Coldwater Village Hall	Coldwater Jurisdiction Meeting #1 – Hazard and Risk Identification
10/27/2016	Mercer County Administration Building	Economic and Community Development Group Meeting
10/27/2016	Mercer County Administration Building	Agriculture Group Meeting
10/27/2016	Mercer County Administration Building	Natural Resources Group Meeting
10/27/2016	Mercer County Administration Building	Auditor and Mapping Group Meeting
12/08/2016	Burkettsville Fire Station	Burkettsville Jurisdiction Meeting #1 – Hazard and Risk Identification
12/08/2016	Mendon Village Hall	Mendon Jurisdiction Meeting #1 – Hazard and Risk Identification
12/08/2016	Mercer Co. Engineer's Office	Engineering and Infrastructure Group Meeting
12/08/2016	St. Henry Village Hall	St. Henry Jurisdiction Meeting #1 – Hazard and Risk Identification
03/20/2017	Fort Recovery Village Hall	Fort Recovery Jurisdiction Meeting #2 – Strategy Development
03/20/2017	Mercer County Courthouse	Township Trustee Planning Meeting
03/20/2017	Mercer County Courthouse	Public Input Meeting
03/20/2017	Mercer County Engineer's Office	Engineering and Infrastructure Meeting
03/20/2017	Montezuma Village Hall	Montezuma Jurisdiction Meeting #2 – Strategy Development
03/20/2017	St. Henry Village Hall	St. Henry Jurisdiction Meeting #2 – Strategy Development
03/21/2017	Burkettsville Fire Station	Burkettsville Jurisdiction Meeting #2 – Strategy Development
03/21/2017	Celina City Hall	Celina Jurisdiction Meeting #2 – Strategy Development
03/21/2017	Chickasaw Village Hall	Chickasaw Jurisdiction Meeting #2 – Strategy Development
03/21/2017	Mendon Village Hall	Mendon Jurisdiction Meeting #2 – Strategy Development
03/21/2017	Rockford Village Hall	Rockford Jurisdiction Meeting #2 – Strategy Development
03/22/2017	Coldwater Village Hall	Coldwater Jurisdiction Meeting #2 – Strategy Development
03/22/2017	Mercer County EMA	Special Interest Group Meeting
06/22/2017	Mercer County EMA	Final Plan Review Meeting

1.2 STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

With nine incorporated jurisdictions and a population of approximately 40,000, many stakeholders in Mercer County were identified as having a role in the mitigation planning process. The Hazard Mitigation Planning Team included broad participation from these identified stakeholders.

From the beginning of the planning process, the EMA attempted to include the whole community in the mitigation planning process. A broad, inclusive list of planning team members was developed with the intention of including any, every, and all agencies with an interest or role in emergency management, and thus in disaster mitigation. As the process unfolded and planning began, a whole community planning approach was used to achieve these goals.

The initial invitation to participate in the Hazard Mitigation Planning Team was extended to the following officials, leaders, and stakeholders from Mercer County and adjacent jurisdictions:

- Incorporated jurisdictions (county, city, and village officials)
- Township representatives (trustees, fiscal officers)
- Specialized disciplines, including fire service, law enforcement, engineering, utilities, public health, healthcare, hospitals, business and industry, education and academia, nonprofits, social agencies, and the general public
- Specific appointed officials, including the county floodplain manager, GIS mapping specialist, conservation specialists, regional planning, building officials, development officials, fire chiefs, police chiefs, public health commissioners, extension agents
- Economic development organizations such as economic development corporations, chambers of commerce, and tourism and visitor's bureaus
- Key elected officials such as the county auditor, treasurer, engineer, and commissioners
- Emergency management officials from the adjacent counties
- Non-profit agencies including American Red Cross, The Salvation Army, Citizen Corps, and United Way as well as community action groups
- Special interest groups such as watershed coalitions, conservancy districts, federal partners, state agencies with facilities in the county, and others with a special interest in the well-being of Mercer County
- Residents, businesses, and the general public

1.2.1 Jurisdiction Participation

All incorporated jurisdictions in Mercer County chose to participate in the countywide hazard mitigation plan. Participating jurisdictions include: Burkettsville, Celina, Chickasaw, Coldwater, Fort Recovery, Mendon, Montezuma, Rockford, and St. Henry. Mercer County participated on behalf of all other areas, but participation was solicited through both county officials and the township sub-structure of government to reach those community members who live in the rural areas. This methodology assured the rural interests would be included in the mitigation plan.

In Ohio, every county is divided into sub-sections called “townships”. Townships are small sections of land, sometimes as small as six square miles. Incorporated jurisdictions (villages and cities) lay on top of the townships, and supersede the township authority as governance for those parcels is absorbed by the municipality. Some townships are totally absorbed by municipalities and are actually a “township on paper” only. In general, the remaining land outside the municipalities is considered “township”, and the elected officials duties are primarily road upkeep and cemetery maintenance. Historically, in Ohio, many trustees of townships have been farmers who used their own equipment to plow snow from roadways.

Townships originally provided a means to identify plats of land and to create the verbiage to create documents like deeds. In Ohio, townships may choose to be zoned, but other land use planning is done by the county level of government. Townships can provide very basic services such as plowing snow from tertiary roads and maintaining cemeteries. Townships do not have the same full authorities as municipalities and counties. Townships cannot levy taxes, and must participate in most programs as an unincorporated area of the county, through the county government officials.

County government handles services including ditch maintenance, plowing and repair of main and secondary roadways, bridge and culvert maintenance, most land use planning, community development, emergency management, and many other humanitarian and financial functions on behalf of the township. Many daily functions of government are handled by the county because townships must, by law, meet at least annually.

Residents living outside incorporated jurisdictions were contacted through the township trustees because that was the best way to reach out to the rural areas in an organized and comprehensive fashion, and to ensure that the entire rural community was included in the planning process. Mercer County did not intend that townships be required to adopt the mitigation plan because that is consistent with other programs of similar nature, including community planning, economic development, emergency management, law enforcement, and other grant administration.

Mercer County has thirteen townships: Black Creek, Butler, Center, Dublin, Franklin, Gibson, Granville, Hopewell, Jefferson, Liberty, Marion, Recovery, Union. While the county will officially adopt the plan on behalf of these townships, trustees, fiscal officers, and other officials were invited to planning team meetings and encouraged to participate in the planning process because of their knowledge of and connection with residents in unincorporated areas.

The officials identified in table 1-2 served as the primary contact for each jurisdiction. They were asked to notify other officials within their jurisdiction of meetings and work sessions and invite any other residents or officials to participate in the planning meetings. These jurisdictions were invited to the initial project kick off meeting in June 2016. Work sessions soliciting input and feedback in developing the HIRA, mitigation strategies, and other parts of the plan were held in the jurisdictions for all to attend in both October 2016 and March 2017.

Jurisdictions were also invited to review the draft plan and participate in the final plan review meeting in June 2017, prior to the plan's submission to state reviewers. These individuals coordinated with the EMA Director and Contractor to schedule local work sessions and invite relevant stakeholders.

Table 1-2: Participating Representatives

Jurisdiction	Position/Title	Representative
Blackcreek Township	Guy Brigner	Fiscal Officer
Burkettsville	Joseph Stammen	Mayor
Butler Township	Charles Dues	Fiscal Officer
Celina	Jeffrey Hazel	Mayor
	Thomas Hitchcock	Safety Service Director
Center Township	Edward Sites	Fiscal Officer
Chickasaw	Doug Huelsman	Mayor
Coldwater	Eric Thomas	Village Manager/Engineer
	Joe Knapschaefer	Mayor
Dublin Township	Jessica Shaffer	Fiscal Officer
Fort Recovery	Randy Diller	Village Administrator
Franklin Township	Lee Ann Dorsten	Fiscal Officer
Gibson Township	Tom Lochtefeld	Fiscal Officer
Granville Township	Nathan Schwieterman	Fiscal Officer
Hopewell Township	Herbert Muhlenkamp	Fiscal Officer
Jefferson Township	Kimberly Bell	Fiscal Officer
Liberty Township	Jill Thomas	Fiscal Officer
Marion Township	Bonnie Garrison	Fiscal Officer
Mendon	John Boroff	Mayor
	Kristina Boroff	Fiscal Officer
Mercer County	Randy Grapner	Auditor
	Greg Homan	Commissioner
	Jerry Laffin	Commissioner
	Rick Muhlenkamp	Commissioner
	James Wiechart	Engineer
Montezuma	Randy Garman	Mayor
Recovery Township	Thomas Sudhoff	Fiscal Officer
Rockford	Jeff Long	Village Administrator
	Amy Joseph	Mayor
St. Henry	Ron Gelhaus	Village Administrator
	Steve Koesters	Mayor
Union Township	Matt Grunden	Fiscal Officer
Washington Township	Ellen Homan	Fiscal Officer

1.2.2 Hazard Mitigation Planning Team

Because Mercer County's intention was to encourage broad participation in the planning process, an expansive initial invitation list was developed. Using information from multiple sources, including EMA contact lists, jurisdiction and agency websites, the Board of Elections, and general online information, a master planning team of more than 100 invitees was

developed. For each contact, this master listed identified name, position, agency or jurisdiction, e-mail address, telephone number, and postal address. This list included representation from business and industry, community services, economic and community development, education, government, infrastructure and engineering, natural resources and agriculture, and public safety. Emergency management officials from adjacent counties were also included on the list. For Mercer County, this included county EMA officials in Ohio and Indiana. The complete list of invited and participating stakeholders is provided in table 1-3.

Table 1-3: Participating and Invited Stakeholders

Agency/Jurisdiction	Position/Title	Representative
Adams County (Indiana) EMA	Director	John August
Auglaize County (Ohio) EMA	Director	Troy Anderson
Briarwood Village		Tara Siebert
Bruns Construction Enterprises		
Burkettsville Fire Department	Fire Chief	Douglas Sieftring
CA Industries	Superintendent	Shawn Thieman
Celina Aluminum Precision Technology		
Celina City School District	Superintendent	Ken Schmiesing
Celina Fire Department	Fire Chief	Doug Wolters
Celina Insurance Group		
Celina Mercer County Chamber of Commerce	Director	Pam Buschur
Celina Police Department	Police Chief	Tom Wale
Celina Tent, Inc.		
Chattanooga Fire Department	Fire Chief	Kevin Hague
Cheesman LLC		
Chickasaw Community Mutual Fire Company	Fire Chief	Mark Seitz
Coldwater Exempted Village School District	Superintendent	Jason Wood
Coldwater Fire Department	Fire Chief	Brent Forsthoefel
Coldwater Police Department	Police Chief	Jason Miller
Coldwater Public Works	Director	Joe Weiss
Cooper Farms Feed & Animal Production	Greg Cooper	
Crown Equipment		Brian Duffy
Darke County (Ohio) EMA	Director	Mindy Saylor
Fort Recovery Industries		Cheryl Buckingham
Fort Recovery Local Scholl District	Superintendent	Justin Firks
Fort Recovery Police Department	Police Chief	Jared Laux
Hemmelgarn and Sons		Dan Schmitz
Immaculate Conception School	Principal	Polly Muhlenkamp
J&M Manufacturing		Jeff Grieshop
Jay County (Indiana) EMA	Director	Ralph Frazee
JR Manufacturing		
Kaup Pharmacy, Inc.		
Kenn-Feld Group		
Lake Improvement Association	President	Tim Lovett
Loramie Valley Alliance	Watershed Coordinator	Jason Bruns

Agency/Jurisdiction	Position/Title	Representative
Marion Local School District	Superintendent	Michael Pohlman
Maumee River Basin Partnership of Local Governments	MS4 Coordinator	Jennifer English
Mendon-Union Fire Department	Fire Chief	Darrell Etgen
Mercer County Community Development Corporation	Director	Jared Ebbing
Mercer County Community Hospital	CEO	Lisa Klenke
Mercer County Farm Service Agency	Acting Director	Michelle Stahl
Mercer County Regional Planning Commission	Secretary/Treasurer	Kim Everman
Mercer County Sheriff's Office	Sheriff	Jeff Grey
Mercer County Soil and Water Conservation District	District Administrator	Nicole Hawk
Mercer County/Celina City Health Departments	Health Commissioner	Amy Poor
Mercer Landmark		Virgil Wilker
Moeller Trucking		
Montezuma Community Fire Company	Fire Chief	Ron Schulze
OSU Mercer County Extension Office	County Director	Barbara Phares
Parkway Local School District	Superintendent	Greg Puthoff
Pax Machine	Owner	Mike Pax
Reynolds & Reynolds	Safety Coordinator	Jan Tindall
Rockford Area Chamber of Commerce	Director	Vacant position
Rockford Community Fire Department	Fire Chief	Rob Belna
Rockford Police Department	Police Chief	Paul May
Romer's Catering and Entertainment Facilities	Owner	Jason Romer
Shelby County (Ohio) EMA	Director	Cheri Drinkwine
Southwest Mercer Fire District	Fire Chief	Kim Day
St. Henry Consolidated Local School District	Superintendent	Julie Garke
St. Henry Fire Department	Fire Chief	Matt Lefeld
St. Henry Police Department	Police Chief	Bob Garman
The People's Bank Co.		
Tri-Star Career Compact	Director	Tim Buschur
Van Wert County (Ohio) EMA	Director	Rick McCoy
Wright State University Lake Campus	Dean	Jay Albayyari

1.2.3 Planning Team Engagement

The plan development schedule included four key sets of meetings and work sessions with additional small group meetings scheduled throughout. Because achieving meaningful participation from a wide range of partners through these sessions was important to the EMA and Contractor, the meeting schedule was developed to provide as many opportunities as possible for stakeholders to participate.

Invitations to meetings and work sessions were sent to stakeholders by e-mail whenever possible as this was the most expedient and efficient method of delivering the information. With a very small staff, the EMA had limited time available to contact individual stakeholders by phone; therefore, the decision was made to utilize e-mail as the primary notification method because of its speed and broad availability. If anyone notified the EMA or Contractor that they did not have e-mail access, postal mail was the alternative notification method. If an email was

returned as undelivered, follow-up was initiated for corrective action. Any continuing communication issues were addressed individually.

In invitations and during meetings, participants were advised that the mitigation planning process was open to the public. Meeting dates were announced to a wide audience and jurisdictions were encouraged to extend invitations to employees, community organizations, and residents. News releases announcing meeting dates and locations were sent to local media for print and online publication and flyers were posted in county and jurisdiction office buildings. Participants were encouraged to share announcements, notices, and information with coworkers, friend, neighbors, family, and community members as much as possible. Contact information for the EMA and Contractor was freely distributed to all participants so that all community members could ask questions, provide input, or otherwise become involved in the planning process.

Throughout the process, the planning team was encouraged to monitor Resource Solutions' project website, located at www.consultrsa.com under "Mercer County Mitigation Plan", for access to meeting schedules, draft plan documents, meeting handouts, mitigation planning resources, contact information, and other resources relevant to the planning process. Planning team members were reminded of this resource during meetings and encouraged to share the information with additional colleagues and community members who may wish to participate. The website was utilized because the open format made content readily available stakeholders and the public and because the Contractor could quickly and easily update the content, providing the planning team with up-to-date information. Participating jurisdictions were encouraged to post a link to the project website on their agency websites to further facilitate community input and feedback.

1.3 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

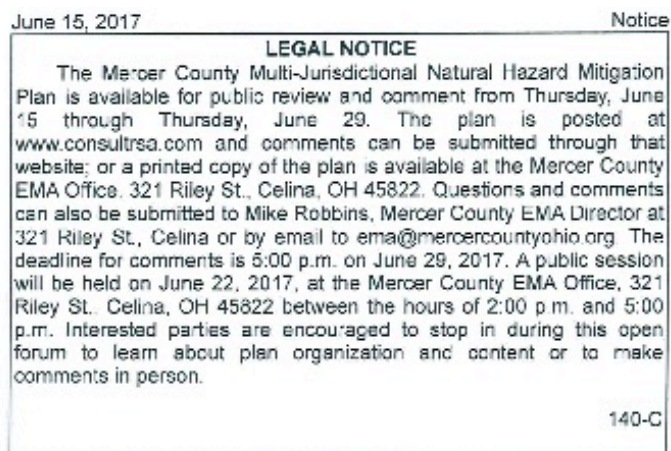
Garnering broad community participation in the mitigation planning process was a focus of the Contractor and EMA. Utilizing FEMA's Whole Community Planning concept, the EMA reached out to a broad scope of community partners, jurisdiction officials, community partners, and stakeholders. These representatives were invited to participate and provide input throughout the planning process. This began with the development of a broad and inclusive planning team invitation. A significant amount of time was dedicated to identifying contacts across all areas and segments of the county and creating an accurate contact list of those individuals. Invitations and reminders were sent to the planning team multiple times. Participants were encouraged to share meeting information with colleagues and community members and encourage others to participate in the planning process. During planning team meetings and work sessions, notices were posted on doors to notify the public that the session was taking place and assist people in locating the sessions.

Throughout the entire planning process, the public was invited to participate and provide input for the updated hazard mitigation plan. The EMA and Contractor attempted to be as inclusive and broad-based as possible when developing the initial planning team invitation list. Contacts

were identified across all jurisdictions, agencies, and organizations to create an accurate contact list. Meeting invitations and reminders were repeatedly sent to the planning team; participants were encouraged to share meeting information with colleagues and community members and invite additional people to participate in the planning process. During planning team meetings, notices were posted on the door of the building and meeting room to notify the public that the meeting was taking place and assist individuals in locating the meeting.

To provide easy, convenient access to planning information for the committee and general public, a project website was created on the Contractor's website. As previously described in section 1.2.3, the website was used to provide meeting dates and locations, contact information, mitigation planning resources, links to surveys and questionnaires, and access to draft plan documents for the planning team and general public. Planning team members and jurisdictions were encouraged to publish this link on their agency websites and social media accounts, providing the public with access to the planning process.

At the initial planning team meeting, the EMA and Contractor informed attendees that all meetings were open to the public and the process of updating the plan was completely transparent. They also shared that the current hazard mitigation plan was available for review on the project website. Participants were encouraged to review that document so that they could develop familiarity with previously identified mitigation strategies and compare that information to current risks and vulnerabilities when providing input into new mitigation strategies. Participants were also encouraged to share meeting invitations, notices, survey links, and other relevant information with colleagues, community members, and others that may have an interest in participating in the project.



A complete draft of the plan was posted on the project website from June 15 – 29, 2017 for a two-week public review period. A public review forum was held on June 22, 2017 to provide the community with the opportunity to view and comment on the plan in person. All agency and jurisdiction representatives who participated on the planning team were notified of this review period by email. An official notice was also sent to each participating jurisdiction. To notify the public, the EMA placed a paid legal notice in *The Daily Standard* (Celina) on June 15,

2017. The EMA provided a notice and link to the plan on their agency website and asked other organizations to do the same. All notifications included a link to the website where the plan was posted, the timeline for public review, and instructions for submitting comments. A printed copy of the plan was available at the Mercer County EMA during regular business hours for anyone wishing to view and comment on the plan but with limited computer access, special needs, or other accessibility challenges.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

A significant amount of research was performed to develop the hazard mitigation plan, which is based on multiple sources of information. Research was conducted through reviews of existing data, plans, and reports and through interviews and conversations with county stakeholders and subject-matter experts.

Since Mercer County's most recent plan was approved in 2006, the Contractor obtained hazard information and data from 2006 through 2017 to ensure that the new plan included current, relevant, and accurate hazard and risk information. Some information from the previous plan was transferred to this plan. All mitigation goals strategies identified in that plan were evaluated and outcomes documented; those findings appear in section 3.0 of this plan.

Additional information was identified through research of recorded events from the National Climatic Data Center Storm Events Database. Incidents that were researched included past ones included in former plans simply for verification, and new incidents after 2006 so that the most recent storms were included. Data was presented to the stakeholders represented on the planning team. Their knowledge of the impact, consequences, and recovery efforts of any past disaster incident was documented. These anecdotal points were included as appropriate in the revised plan.

The county profile includes information discovered through the study of various county documents. Information about community development, business and industry, land use regulations, and community life were researched and findings that were relevant to mitigation planning were included as parts of narratives and explanations. Online sources like US Census Bureau data were accessed for statistical data. Federal, state, and local government agency websites and reports were utilized for statistical and historic information.

The hazard identification was developed through research of actual recorded events based on records from the Storm Events Database of the National Climatic Data Center. Supporting data was obtained from the Ohio EMA, FEMA, Tornado History Project, Stanford University Dam Program, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and other sources. Planning team members provided additional detail, context, and descriptions of the community impact for many historical incidents. The most significant events for each hazard are described in narrative form in the HIRA. Appendix A includes a complete list of all recorded occurrences of each hazard, organized by type of hazard.

The vulnerability assessment and risk analysis were informed by multiple data sources. HAZUS projections helped establish potential losses in flood and earthquake incidents. The auditor provided property valuations for residential, commercial, agricultural, and exempt properties and mapping information. Current critical facility and key resource inventories were used to project loss estimates for those facilities. The 2006 Mercer County Hazard Mitigation Plan contained information that was still reflective of risks, vulnerabilities, and conditions, which were retained in this plan where applicable. FEMA documents were referenced to identify how many losses were reported, when, and because of what impact in the past. Included in this estimation were possibility, probability, magnitude, and frequency of each category of hazard and its potential impact upon Mercer County.

Watershed Discovery Reports were used to facilitate discussion about waterway and watershed management issues. There were many issues of agricultural interest as the reports were applied to Mercer County and specific points were discussed. The reports were referenced, and meeting participants were informed of those findings. Copies of the plan and online locations were offered to participants, and some natural resources stakeholders were already familiar with the Discovery Reports. Discussions took place regarding the mitigation actions and management practices that were recommended in the Discovery Reports. In some cases, local stakeholders agreed with the reports, and mitigation actions were crafted to support and facilitate the Discovery Report recommendations. In some cases, local stakeholders felt the report was not entirely accurate, or the mitigation action was not feasible. In those cases, the mitigation actions were not included in this plan. The mitigation strategies in this plan are reflective of the plan participant input.

Table 1-4 provides a list of the sources utilized in the research phase of this project.

Table 1-4: Studies, Reports, and References

Document	Author/Agency	Date
Auglaize Watershed Discovery Report	FEMA	2011
Community Health Assessment	Mercer County Department of Health	2016
Community Health Improvement Plan	Mercer County Department of Health	2013-2015
Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQUP)	United States Department of Agriculture	2013
Federal Disaster Declaration Statistics	FEMA	2017
Grand Lake/Wabash Watershed Alliance Action Plan (WAP)	Grand Lake/Wabash Watershed Alliance	2016
Ground Water Potential Pollution Study	US Geological Service	1989/ 2004 update
HAZUS Earthquake and Flood data	Ohio EMA	2012
Mercer County Comprehensive Plan	Mercer County Regional Planning	2013
Mercer County Hazard Mitigation Plan 2006 and sections from 2012 update work	Mercer County EMA	2006, 2012

Document	Author/Agency	Date
Mercer County Hazard Profile and Risk Assessment (Collection of local notes and research after severe storms and incidents dating back to approximately 2001)	EMA	2001
Soil Survey of Mercer County	USDA	1979
State of Ohio Enhanced Hazard Mitigation Plan	Ohio EMA	2014
Storm Events Database	NOAA	2017
Study Plan for the Lower Auglaize River Tributaries	Ohio Department of Natural Resources	2014
United States Census	US Census Bureau	2010/2012
Upper Great Miami Watershed Discovery Report	FEMA	2011
Upper Wabash Discovery Report	FEMA	2016
Western Ohio Cropland Values	Ohio State University	2014

1.5 PLAN MAINTENANCE

Plan maintenance is a critical element of the hazard mitigation plan. Diligent plan maintenance establishes a schedule to re-engage stakeholders in the mitigation plan at regular intervals and lays a solid groundwork for the required five-year update. By reviewing disaster occurrences on an annual basis and frequently assessing the county's progress on mitigation activities, a five-year update can be a quick and efficient process. However, the plan is often put on a shelf after approval and not opened again until the renewal deadline looms. Mercer County does not intend to let this happen. Upon approval of this plan, Mercer County is determined to follow a regular plan maintenance schedule. The EMA will lead this effort and involve stakeholders, jurisdictions, and the community, laying a solid foundation for the plan update in 2022.

1.5.1 Plan Maintenance Methodology

A significant challenge in conducting annual plan review is the difficulty in holding meetings that are well attended. Many stakeholders perceive these meetings as unnecessary or not critical and do not attend. Government officials, community leaders, and other key stakeholders also have busy schedules and competing demands on their time and must and prioritize their attendance at different events. In rural Mercer County, most jurisdictions and organizations have only a few employees. In the villages and townships, many elected and appointed officials serve in a part-time or volunteer capacity. These staffing realities often make conducting community-wide meetings a challenge. Mercer County's plan maintenance strategy attempts to address these barriers by incorporating other communication and data-collection methods throughout the five-year life of the plan.

Traditional face-to-face meetings have been the most common method to discuss disaster responses, catastrophic incidents, and storms. Given the challenges in scheduling these, Mercer County may choose to utilize webinars, conference calls, electronic surveys, and/or questionnaires to collect feedback from stakeholders. These options are utilized frequently in today's business environment and will be accessible to most stakeholders. When these options

are selected, stakeholders will be asked to dedicate the same attention to the task as they would an in-person meeting. Records of participation, copies of results, and other communication surrounding these events will be maintained just as it would be for a meeting.

1.5.2 Annual Plan Review

The Hazard Mitigation Planning Team will be called upon to review, evaluate, and discuss the plan annually, on or about the anniversary of the plan approval date. Annual plan maintenance discussions may be conducted through traditional in-person meetings or webinars, electronic surveys, questionnaires, or other forms of communication. The choice of methodology will be at the discretion of the EMA Director based on what best meets the needs of stakeholders and ensures that mitigation strategies are considered on a regular basis. All information-gathering efforts will include evaluation of the past year's disaster incidents and a summary of the resulting damages, costs, and recovery efforts. Status reports on any mitigation projects in process and an update on progress towards achieving the mitigation strategies and actions developed by each jurisdiction will also be included. The EMA will maintain records of these annual discussions.

As part of the annual review process, jurisdictions will be asked to conduct an internal analysis of the mitigation strategies developed by their jurisdiction and submit a short report to the EMA with their findings. The report will include an assessment of any disaster incidents that occurred during the year, a summary of damages and recovery efforts, and a status report on the status of adopted mitigation strategies as a result of those incidents. If a strategy has been completed, the jurisdiction will evaluate its effectiveness at reducing losses. This information will be shared with the countywide planning team during the annual countywide review process. The EMA will maintain a summary of these reports and findings.

The EMA may choose to convene a planning team meeting after any significant disaster or large-scale emergency to review and document any changes, needs, additions, or deletions that should be considered at the five-year update. Any time a disaster is declared in Mercer County, it is suggested that the planning team assemble after the incident is closed to review the plan with emphasis on the strategies and the status of each. The EMA will maintain records of these meetings and findings.

At each review point, the EMA will review the Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment for completeness and accuracy. Loss estimates will be evaluated for ongoing accuracy and any significant developments will be added to the list and mitigation strategies will be reviewed for progress and effectiveness. All findings will be recorded and saved for the 2022 update process.

1.5.3 Community Participation

While the EMA is responsible for leading the plan maintenance effort, that process only works if stakeholders are engaged. Ongoing consideration of hazard mitigation strategies is critical to creating a resilient and sustainable community. It is the EMA's intention that the stakeholders representing the municipalities, jurisdictions, agencies, and organizations involved in plan development will continue to participate in its ongoing review and maintenance. Without their

participation, ongoing input will not be comprehensive or accurate. Therefore, all parties involved in developing this plan must perceive the annual review process as critical to the pre- and post-disaster welfare of the county.

Public involvement is an important component of ongoing mitigation planning efforts. To encourage public involvement in plan maintenance, notices of annual plan review activities will be published through local media and appropriate websites and social media accounts of participating jurisdictions and agencies. The general public will be invited to participate in these activities and provide input. Meeting announcements will include the date, time, and location of the session and adequate notice so that people have reasonable time to plan their attendance. As with all meetings conducted during plan development, annual update meetings will be open to the public and community input will be encouraged. If surveys and other electronic tools are utilized to collect feedback from stakeholders, these documents will also be made available to the community.

1.5.4 Integration with Community Planning Mechanisms

Local government participation in plan maintenance activities is a major factor in the implementation and achievement of mitigation strategies as well as assessment for new and additional mitigation actions. This participation occurs during intentional mitigation plan review and, more importantly, during daily operations within each jurisdiction that guide the growth and development of specific communities. Most jurisdictions in the county have planning commissions or a committee within the jurisdiction's elected council that addresses growth and development issues within the municipality. These commissions and committees are responsible to jurisdiction's top elected official, who is then responsible for working with the Mercer County officials who hold similar responsibility at the county government level.

An additional function of jurisdiction planning commissions and committees is to provide leadership for new development and business or residential growth in the community that complies with Mercer County development goals and standards. These entities determine what growth initiatives are implemented by the municipalities and provide leadership for recruiting, promoting, and securing new industries, businesses, and residential facilities. These groups work with the county officials who guide the construction of new buildings and homes, and who oversee and inspect new structures.

At the county level, Mercer County's Regional Planning Commission is charged with developing a long-term comprehensive plan to guide the county's growth and development, including the use of land and resources. The Regional Planning Commission is an advisory and regulatory board that approves and guides county development. The planning commission meets monthly and includes representation from the county engineer's office, zoning and code enforcement officials, health department personnel, municipalities, and townships as well as at-large representatives. The county planning commission works with jurisdiction commissions and committees to apply land use guidance across the entire county. At this time, there is no representation from emergency management on the county's planning commission. As an outcome of the hazard mitigation planning process, the county identified that as a gap in

addressing hazard mitigation and is considering how to incorporate that expertise into their work.

The County Engineer is the floodplain manager. Tax map and GIS services are part of the County Auditor's office. The county's engineer and some staff are part of the Regional Planning Commission. Lenders work with the floodplain manager to comply with flood prevention regulations as part of the lending process. All commercial development must get approval from the Regional Planning Commission before construction takes place, and as part of the loan process. Properties must be surveyed and confirmed to be or not be located in a flood plain. Since 1996, any property utilizing federal funding to build or renovate must have flood insurance if the property is located in a flood plain, and lenders require mortgaged property to have flood insurance. Currently, the Regional Planning Commission is the voice of mitigation implementation, but Mercer County officials have included development of EMA involvement in development and comprehensive planning as a mitigation strategy in this plan.

The county will strive to consider hazard mitigation across all other community planning efforts, especially in the comprehensive plan, and intends to include information about hazards, risks, and vulnerabilities in all planning areas. The EMA and Regional Planning will share responsibility to integrate mitigation planning into economic development, land use planning, land use regulation, conservation, response plans, and other plans that are important to the daily operation of the county. Disaster mitigation will be promoted as part of community development, making its way into a comprehensive array of disciplines and interests. Key stakeholders, including the County Commissioners, Economic Development, Regional Planning Commission, Floodplain Administrator, Engineer's Office, zoning officials, and public safety officers from across Mercer County will be important partners in this effort. These individuals will work through their respective agencies to promote mitigation planning and its inclusion in the plans, procedures, guidelines, and priorities of each agency, thus making mitigation a true community-wide effort.

1.5.5 Documentation of Plan Maintenance

Mercer County will consider communication with stakeholders and the public regarding hazard mitigation to be an annual necessity. The EMA will schedule, complete, and record these communications and the results of all meetings to facilitate an expeditious plan update in 2022. It will be the EMA's responsibility to maintain documentation of all ongoing plan maintenance activities. These records should include the date, time, and attendance at review meetings, findings of each review, and recommendations from stakeholders for changes, additions, or deletions at the next update. Results from any surveys and questionnaires used to collect information should be maintained, as well as reports submitted by jurisdictions. E-mail and written communication from stakeholders and the public should be saved for consideration during annual review activities. All reports, documents, and files can be saved electronically so that they are easier to find and less cumbersome to maintain.

1.5.6 Plan Update Cycle

Mercer County's Hazard Mitigation Plan will expire in 2022. With generous documentation of ongoing plan maintenance, the county should be positioned to submit an updated plan well before the current plan's expiration date. To ensure the appropriate timeline is met, formal efforts to update the plan will begin in mid-2020. The EMA Director will ensure that the appropriate and necessary steps are taken to complete this process.