

# Resilient Communities World Cafe

March 10, 2022

## Question 1: What could healthy and resilient communities in the Deerfield Watershed and surrounding region look and feel like?

### People:

- More public access that is safe (“get people out of harm’s way”), easy, managed and equitable – with more shade
- Access to alternate transportation (walking, biking, mass transit) to access workplaces, schools, green spaces
- Need folks to fall in love with the river and be connected with it in order to steward it
- More diverse
- Fishing, swimming, trails along rivers (to allow enjoyment of wildlife observation and observation of the river)
- Continue to build “people power” and resiliency efforts
- Continue this proactive work
- Farms, farmers along the river. What can they do? Buffers? Crop insurance? Payment for ecosystem services; doubling the value for buffers
- Vibrant recreational economy
- Funding for this work is/can be a challenge

### River:

- Identify vulnerable structures, especially ones that are right next to the river and frequently damaged by floods, erosion; evaluate feasibility of moving/relocating these structures
- Reconnect the river to its floodplain; abandoned floodplains; establish/re-establish native floodplain forests; reconnect upland tributary streams to their floodplains
- Undamaged infrastructure
- Responsible and respectful information about natural resources, open space
- Flexible
- Room for rivers to shift
- Deeper, colder waters for fish
- More instream habitat
- Wild and scenic rivers
- Strategic watershed planning- ex. hazardous materials stored outside floodplain

### Land:

- Low impact land uses along rivers
- Early detection and coordinated response to invasive species
- Larger buffers that support healthy vegetation
- Local agriculture that avoids damage to the environment

- Healthy soils
- Managing forested land for ecosystem services; flood resiliency; native species in the floodplain; map existing floodplain forests and floodplains with native species; finding replacements for threatened tree species, e. g, ash, hemlock

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**Question 2: Considering the social/environmental/economic issues facing the region (particularly under conditions of climate change), what actions and/or equitable new directions could help create truly resilient communities?**

**People/Education/Outreach**

- Help one another on the fly
- Not anticipating just jumping in! Reminds me of Rebecca Solnit's book Paradise in Hell (communities sticking together during catastrophes); "Our connection is our protection"
- Get to know agencies on the ground
- Create and provide access to low-impact areas for public use of natural spaces
- Social capital; trust and cooperation between neighbors - to better coordinate disaster response and away from "business as usual" - help from peers
- Neighborhood sharing group (e.g. generators)? Like how buyers coops started (Using Google docs to take inventory of resources, creating a culture of borrowing/sharing);
- Form neighborhood pods
- Youth engagement activities around resilient communities projects (Youth Action Group) that works on Climate Action Plans
- Build unity around river issues.
- Help community prepare for and welcome new neighbors from climate migration.
- Increase access - both for a range of economic classes, abilities, interests in river use
- Focus on caring for and supporting the most vulnerable in the communities and those that are most impacted by climate change; honest, genuine, empathetic outreach; more care in how we treat communities and rivers \*after\* a disaster - community/social systems
- The community picture will change as climigration accelerates so there will be a more diverse community.
- Encourage public conversations to identify and address challenges
- Education about how to use environmental models/tools
- Small-scale community-level talks
- Increase public outreach and education and engagement from resilient communities partners
- Look truly region wide to foster resilient communities whether its energy efficient affordable housing, local food production or climigration
- More education and outreach and opportunities for engagement to have discussions and share information

- Community generated resources, food, (Reflecting on film, “From Hurricane to Climate Change”)
- Bring younger generation into the discussion
- Resilient social networks (emergency: think mutual aid, but what about long-term?)
- Increased information/education - how to get people to love/care for the rivers

### **Planning/Policies/Tools/Infrastructure**

- Intentional, proactive planning
- New policies for development
- Data-based decision-making
- Provide access to resources for responding to disasters
- Agency coordination across levels/jurisdictions
- Manage who/what is allowed to build in locations that are vulnerable to environmental threats
- Federal/state buy-outs of property in flood plains
- Public housing (HUD) plans for residents of these communities - relocation needs or support systems in place
- Unemployment Insurance programs for economic impact of events
- State auditor report showed Western MA towns difficulty in accessing grants. Will be important to support local communities to get grants to do this work. Need to access infrastructure money.
- Assistance from state and federal granting agencies.
- Hire grant writers. Need planning and need matching funds.
- Need changes in permitting process to make it easier to design, permit, and build resiliency projects. Having examples to show permittees is helpful – get message out.
- With agricultural land, that resource will be called on for use as other areas become inhibited by climate change so protect land and the rivers so we can have the agricultural land available.
- Need the infrastructure to support the demand for increased agricultural use.
- Need planning and zoning changes to be ready for increased migration populations.
- Deal with river access so that there is a welcoming nature for all by those who live here now and those that may move here- create welcoming bridges.
- Help towns to work with commercial recreation enterprises so resources are protected and work to ensure economic benefits to the towns.
- Need viable water supplies for economic activity, municipal uses and personal consumption.
- Better data for hazard events, especially for rain events, so we can design more resilient infrastructure, etc.
- For restoration projects - like chop & drop - need more monitoring and data so regulators will “buy in”
- Streamline environmental permitting; develop design standards for river restoration projects like floodplain reconnection, working in sensitive resource areas with endangered species, coldwater streams
- State policies and regulations need to catch up to the vision for resilient communities

- Planning for climate migration and thoughtful development that is not in floodplains and FEH zones
- Tax incentives that encourage thoughtful development
- Infill development, adaptive reuse
- Zoning that encourages climate resilient development
- Better stormwater management and retrofits in developed areas
- Planning for drinking water supplies, wastewater disposal
- Managed retreat - from river corridor area - River Corridor Easement tool
- RiverSmart actions
- Infrastructure upgrades
- Planning with geomorphology in mind
- Dam removal
- Community assistance - regional intermediaries (FRCoG, WRC, etc)
- Ensuring greater representation throughout the community in planning/actions/etc
- How to incentivize and compensate folks in the floodplain (or how to encourage relocation - how to find enough places to live? How to provide equitable trade-offs?)
- Safe transportation around streams/riders
- Floodplain reconnection, instream habitat, ecological health for all levels of the food web
- Streamline permitting process for resiliency projects

#### **General**

- Windows widening for threats
- Smaller everything

### **Question 3: What is needed to advance the work of the Resilient Communities partnership and other initiatives in the region over the next 10 years and beyond?**

#### **Funding/Economics**

- Consistent funding; MONEY!!!!
- VT Clean Water Act is source of funds - established in 2015
- Having different entities on the same page is key to federal reimbursement: VTrans + VT ANR for example, and Belchertown DPW/Town + ConComm... working together gets things done!
- Could Vermont incentives work for Massachusetts? E.g. state picking up ever larger portions of the tab for municipalities adopting protections and bylaws.
- More support from the state - political will and support to advance policy; funding
- Invest in long-term fixes
- What if the SWMI gave credit for restoration and habitat improvements?
- Let nonprofits and RPAs apply for MVP grants to help watershed communities

#### **Collaboration/Documentation/Outreach**

- Compile work/reports that inform one another/relate to each other, summarizing findings

- Coordinating efforts and sharing information easily and quickly
- Inter-agency, multiple agencies, ngos, multi-state working together and aspect that should continue
- We need to work on getting Boston (EEA) more involved
- Building support among businesses for increased resiliency
- Reach out to local businesses and developers and have them participate in CRC
- Continue to have collaborations between community groups and regional planning commissions, and other groups.
- Widespread, accessible messaging around partnership successes
- Interdisciplinary community planning and resource management
- Empower individual actions
- Peer learning for municipalities
- Give back upstream: often more resources, population, economy in downstream communities
- To advance resiliency work, utilize the tools that have been developed in the last 10 years. We need to have a central depository/clearinghouse to access the tools and make sure that we are building on the tools and recreating things
- Welcoming and sharing river resources
- Strong communication between organizations/agencies that have power, resources
- The Partnership will be very critical into the future to help facilitate/deploy resources throughout the workforce. Infrastructure money is going to be available, and we can build on our successes. The partnership has helped build linkages between groups and that should continue to be a focus into the future. Sharing resources and ideas help build programs and projects in other areas of the region.
- Capture people's stories from the impact of large events so that people working in the field currently and into the future can see/feel the impact of what these events have on people's lives.
- Strengthen the cross border connections and collaborations to look watershed wide.
- Documenting lessons learned from events will help build on what can be/should be done in the future.
- Continue outreach and education on river dynamics. Keep using tools like Stream Tables going.
- As more development begins to happen (climate and pandemic migrations to rural areas), plan our communities through zoning to steer development to appropriate areas.
- How do you make your local businesses adaptable and resilient. Recreational businesses and agriculture are going to be very impacted by climate change (droughts, flood events), what models can they start to adopt now to make sure that they can continue into the future.
- Motivate climate-resilient policies and practices
- Cost-sharing for events, more if proactive best practices in place, incentive program
- More circuit riders to support small towns that rely on volunteers to advance projects

## Access

- Accessible to wider population
- Plenty of sustainable public-access for everyone
- Safe and planned access so we preserve what's here
- Giving the river room to move while allowing for continued access and enjoyment

## Planning/Land/River

- Leverage approved plans that prioritize actions (ex. Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan)
- Connected floodplains so river has ability to access its floodplains
- Agricultural be able to maximize local and resilient production
- Be able to produce something in buffer which can shore up banks of river and still provide income to farmer (limits ability to harvest and maintain)
- Rivers provide productivity and resources - e.g. fish for diet
- Able to provide locally grown and marketed foods
- History of development - often turned our backs to the river - rivers often not celebrated. Look at removing or reconfiguring access and buildings surrounding the river. (We can look to Marion Stoddard wanting to swim in the river(s), or downtown Reno, NV with a big public park on an island in the river in the middle of town with a month-long festival in July, as productive ways to engage with river love!)
- Watershed wide perspective from headwaters all the way down to CT River
- Think about what is happening in the headwaters - What happens in upstream communities are really important
- Watershed-wide management: everyone contributes to a fund: upstream restoration to prevent erosion, downstream floodwater damage repair, all could come out of the fund.
- Policies
- Continuity of projects - staffed by paid administrators to manage progress
- Opportunities to learn about processes of one another's projects; sharing strategies and wisdom from separate experiences. (Periodic meetings/conferences?)
- Revisit partnerships/collaborations that formed from previous events to nurture & maintain the spirit of cooperation and put together some coordinated plans for prevention and response
- Do the studies now that show what infrastructure designs are needed before the disaster occurs so that the appropriate replacements are known well before they are needed
- Establishing guidelines for practices during emergency recovery (i.e., driving tractors in streams; national guard's removal of boulders and trees within riverfront area)
- Make sure riverfront regulations apply during period of declared state of emergency
- Enhance the application of the FRCOG Toolkit
- River Corridors in MA??? Or at least make progress in that direction...
- Mapped in Vermont ... discussed in Town Plans... BUT implementation of Bylaws including River corridors isn't even done in VT yet...
- Don't people want to know if they're in a hazard area??? (I know this is naive)
- There are requirements in purchase and sale agreements now requiring disclosure of flood hazards

- Even if the Feds aren't paying attention to climate change, the private insurance companies are! They're researching it... etc.
- Restoration project in Conway, MA - having difficulty getting permits - so frustrating! Spent a year plus studying it... State DEP not so familiar with resilient projects???
- Dornbush project was one of three projects we had assessed - Colrain - Municipal supply well (not approved) and another was also not approved... upstream of Natural Roofs.... Right below center of town was the South River Meadow, was the floodplain we put in on the South River (approved)
- Great projects on the books that cannot be executed - what do we need to make these happen? Economic viability? Engineering? Data? Funding? Help with regulations?
- Watershed scale planning and project implementation - local, regional and across the state
- Building staff capacity at local level (town)
- Watershed keeper position -circuit rider
- Build capacity for the regional intermediaries - like VT Basin planners and VT pays RPAs, watershed groups, etc. to get work done

### **General**

- Carry on the momentum!
- Make it easier to build back better, easier permitting, financial assistance
- Don't accept the same approaches that haven't been successful
- Healthy and resilient beyond flooding protection