

Public Participation in the City of Everett's Hazard Mitigation Plan Update Process

Resetting the Bar for Public Participation in Hazard Mitigation Planning

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Introduction

The City of Everett's 2010-2011 hazard mitigation plan update process's goal was to raise the best-practices bar for public participation by expanding the breadth of the participating public and capturing more of the value that public participation brings to hazard mitigation planning. Ultimately, the process that resulted brought excitement to the planning process, helping to build the relationships that will continue to support hazard mitigation in Everett.

The American Planning Association (APA) describes engaging citizens in the production of ideas and analysis that become mitigation strategies, action items, and policies as the 'gold standard' for public participation in hazard mitigation planning. Everett sought a new 'gold standard' that also used citizen engagement as a mitigation strategy: involving communities in analyzing and mitigating their own risks, learning from them about previously unrecognized vulnerabilities, and educating them about the potential impacts from local hazards.

The idea to test the boundaries of public participation in hazard mitigation planning came from one of the first meetings between members of the project team, consisting of representatives from the Everett Office of Emergency Management (OEM), Everett's Office of Neighborhoods, the City's Public Information Director and the University of Washington Institute for Hazard Mitigation Planning and Research (UW). OEM and UW representatives both set their ultimate planning goal as the creation of a hazard mitigation plan that reduced both citywide risks and empowered community members to also take independent risk-reducing action. For this, the plan had to be accessible and widely accepted. A strong public process is the tool to fulfill both of these requirements.

Everett's public outreach process built on existing planning tools while introducing new ones. It successfully integrated community members, the Steering Committee, city staff, and the UW Project Team, bringing specialized experience from public, private, and academic sectors. This process empowered citizens to help create strategies and action items. In so doing, it expanded the definition of technical stakeholder to include hazard-aware members of the community as well as city staff. Throughout this process, outreach was conducted through diverse media, utilizing a variety of innovative participation formats, including a World Café event, a survey, and an open house, all advertised over Everett's Network of Networks.

Ultimately, the long-term success of public participation efforts will be made visible through the implementation of the plan. In the short term, the process was able to energize hazard-aware community members and provide them the opportunity to contribute to mitigation in Everett through their input on the plan. While reaching other, traditionally vulnerable populations (such as low-income or speakers of other languages) proved difficult, Everett began to develop strategies for reaching these groups in the future through action items in the new hazard mitigation plan.

Process Overview

Public participation in hazard mitigation is both required by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regulations and state guidelines. It is also critical to the success of a hazard mitigation plan since citizens are often the most effective advocates for mitigation planning and many mitigation items require citizen commitment to implement. The hazard mitigation plan serves several purposes for citizens, it: outlines the risks, provides mitigation actions, educates the public about possible mitigation actions, and creates strategies and action items to make the community more secure.

The level of public participation required, however, is basic, and therefore the City of Everett with support from the UW Project Team implemented a more rigorous process designed to more actively encourage and empower citizens to be part of the hazard planning process. The methods have included:

- A World Café event that brought together over 80 citizens from the community to discuss the risks posed by hazards and the strategies and opportunities that could be implemented to reduce the risk from those hazards.
- Outreach via a “Network of Networks,” a viral marketing strategy that is a collection of email lists connecting thousands of people throughout the city, reached through friends, family, and colleagues as well as through organizations of which they are a part. Other outreach methods include newspapers, public access television, city

Requirement §201.6(b): In order to develop a more comprehensive approach to reducing the effects of natural disasters, the planning process shall include:

(1) An opportunity for the public to comment on the plan during the drafting stage and prior to plan approval; (2) An opportunity for neighboring communities, local and regional agencies involved in hazard mitigation activities, and agencies that have the authority to regulate development, as well as businesses, academia and other private and non-profit interests to be involved in the planning process; and (3) Review and incorporation, if appropriate, of existing plans, studies, reports, and technical information.

A. Does the plan provide a narrative description of the process followed to prepare the new or updated plan?”

B. Does the new or updated plan indicate who was involved in the current planning process? (For example, who led the development at the staff level and were there any external contributors such as contractors? Who participated on the plan committee, provided information, reviewed drafts, etc.?)

C. Does the new or updated plan indicate how the public was involved? (Was the public provided an opportunity to comment on the plan during the drafting stage and prior to the plan approval?)

D. Does the new or updated plan discuss the opportunity for neighboring communities, agencies, businesses, academia, nonprofits, and other interested parties to be involved in the planning process?

Figure 1: FEMA Public Process Requirements

websites, neighborhood flyers, and public transportation advertisements.

- More traditional public meetings and steering committee meetings (representatives from neighborhoods, city departments, and major business groups). The Everett Hazards Mitigation Steering Committee was convened by the city in order to begin the process of choosing and ranking hazards for inclusion in the HIVA and to ensure that key stakeholders from city government, local organizations, and businesses were involved.
- A questionnaire distributed via the “Network of Networks” as well as other means designed to facilitate input into the planning process by those citizens not reached by (or unable to attend) meetings or other events.
- An interactive Open House event to showcase the final drafts of the strategies and action items in order to provide residents an additional opportunity to provide input, make edits, or suggest additions to the plan.

The Everett process sought to engage the hazard-aware community using innovative outreach tools while also encouraging the involvement of representatives of traditionally-underrepresented publics. The goal was to break down barriers in order to expand participation because “any good idea is a good idea, regardless of the source.” Ultimately, the process would be judged a success if citizen input generated new ideas (or support for, and the refinement of, existing ones) and if citizens could see the results of their participation in the final plan. The final hazard mitigation plan reflects the involvement of the many stakeholders who participated and has been continuously vetted by participants.

Final Everett Process

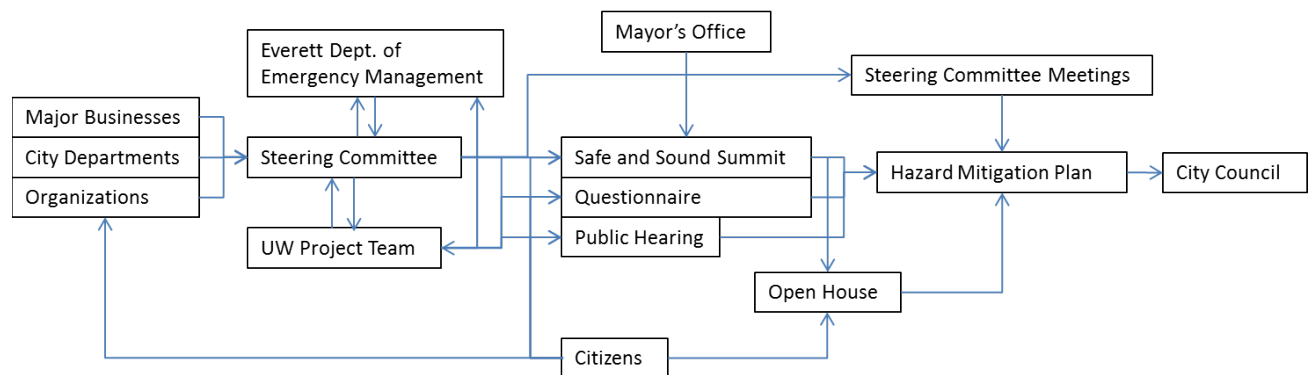


Figure 2: A Conceptual Model of Everett's Public Process (D. Hiebert-Flamm)

Process Innovations

In collaboration with the University of Washington Institute for Hazard Mitigation Planning and Research, the City of Everett incorporated a number of innovations into the public process. The first of these was academic collaboration itself. By working with a university, Everett gained access to students working on alternative public participation methodologies, and researching

public processes. This kind of relationship is critical to bridging the current gap between research and practice, and can improve the quality of both research and practice.

The second major innovation was an implicit part of the drive to incorporate citizens, especially CERT volunteers, Red Cross members, and other members of the hazard-aware community, into the planning process as stakeholders. These community members brought a wealth of knowledge to public events which improved the quality of the plan. Furthermore, by engaging these members of the public, a hazard mitigation “cheering section” could be created to ensure the long-term success of the plan through the implementation of its strategies and action items.

A third innovation was the use of diverse technologies and outreach methods as tools to expand public involvement. In addition to the usual website postings and newspaper advertisements, Everett utilized the Network of Networks, a collection of 50-75 independent email lists, to reach a varied population. The recipients were then encouraged to send the message out to other email lists, thereby expanding the population receiving notices of meetings, updates on the planning process, or other information. The idea behind employing methods that reached into existing networks belonging to independent organizations and different city offices was based in viral marketing. By applying viral marketing techniques to citywide information sharing, it may be possible to create messages that can better fit within existing communications networks, reaching citizens directly.

The fourth major innovation was the application of a number of creative participation methods to hazard planning. The Safe and Sound Summit used the World Café meeting style to provide a deliberative format where participants could meet to discuss risks without the formality of traditional public meetings. In the third Steering Committee meeting, participants were provided with a schedule and could call in via phone to a webinar when the action items and strategies important to them were being discussed. This format was designed to better fit the schedules of participants. The final open house used graphics, comment cards, and post-it notes to allow participants to comment in real-time on display posters and write detailed responses to the prepared action items and strategies. These events were organized through discussions between city staff and members of the UW Project Team and were designed to incorporate and advance best practices in accordance with the latest innovations from theory and practice.

Finally, in an attempt to reach populations not traditionally represented in the planning process, the Everett OEM invited citizens to participate in the Steering Committee. Although few citizens chose to participate, the identification and recruitment of representatives of underrepresented or especially at-risk populations to serve on the Steering Committee should be pursued even more aggressively in the future. This is because the involvement of at-risk

populations is a key to reducing the vulnerability of those populations and, should the widespread involvement of members of those communities be impossible, the involvement of at least some representatives should be secured.

Outreach Elements

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee was the primary body in charge of working with the Project Team to identify risks and design strategies and action items. It included stakeholders representing a variety of interests in local businesses, organizations, and government. Many Committee members were also present at the Safe and Sound Summit. Steering Committee meetings were always advertised on the City of Everett website and open to the public, though they were not conceived of as the primary means of public involvement, which instead would come through the Safe and Sound Summit, the Open House, and the survey.

First Meeting

The first Steering Committee Meeting was held December 1, 2010 at the Floral Hall building in Everett, to acquaint the participants with the identified hazards and rank those hazards. The hazard ranking then guided the focus of the Project Team. Thirty-two people attended, out of the 51 invited. The Project Team conducted a presentation on the hazards facing Everett and answered questions from Committee members about hazards and the mitigation planning process. The Steering Committee also confirmed, through discussion and comment forms, that the 2006 Mitigation Goals were still relevant and did not require any changes. The meeting followed a roundtable format, with the Project Team presentation leading into a discussion between participants and Team members. A comment form offered participants another means of feedback, which the Project Team collected and recorded following the meeting.

Second Meeting

The second meeting occurred on January 24, 2011 at the police South Precinct in Everett. The Project Team presented the risks facing Everett from natural hazards, and participants commented on how they perceived the severity of different risks. The Project Team provided comment forms and collected responses from participants. Twenty-six people attended.

Webinar

The third meeting was a webinar and conference call on February 28, 2011 in order to fit participant's schedules. During the presentation, Project Team members introduced possible strategies and action items for Committee member consideration. Invited participants received a schedule ahead of time and had the ability to call in when topics of interest to them were under discussion. Participants were encouraged to ask questions or comment at the close of each topic presentation. Over the course of the meeting, 28 people participated.

Final Meeting

The final meeting was Thursday, May 5 at Legion Hall to create final drafts of the action items and strategies with input from the Steering Committee. Project Team members presented the risks facing Everett, the action items, and the progress on an economic mitigation plan. Project Team members then worked with several groups of Steering Committee members to take comments and make modifications to action items and strategies. The meeting was lively and productive, with productive input from the 21 people in attendance. The notes from the meeting contributed to the finalizing of the action items before their final presentation to the public at the Open House the following week.

Survey

The survey functioned as an opportunity for citizens who were not able to attend meetings to provide input into the hazard mitigation planning process. The survey was sent out through the Network of Networks and was posted online on the Everett website. The survey also had questions related to willingness to mitigate, risk perception, and preparedness measures, and was modeled after a similar one used in the Snohomish County Hazard Mitigation Plan update. The results will guide public outreach, mitigation action items and strategies. The survey also revealed some of the demographics of the participants in the planning process, such as the length of residence in Everett and rates of homeownership. There were 166 responses to the survey.

Safe and Sound Summit

The World Café, titled the Safe and Sound Summit: Help Everett Master Disaster, was the result of a discussion between City of Everett staff and the University of Washington Institute for Hazards Mitigation Planning and Research. It was determined that a meeting format designed to solicit

ideas from citizens on how to reduce

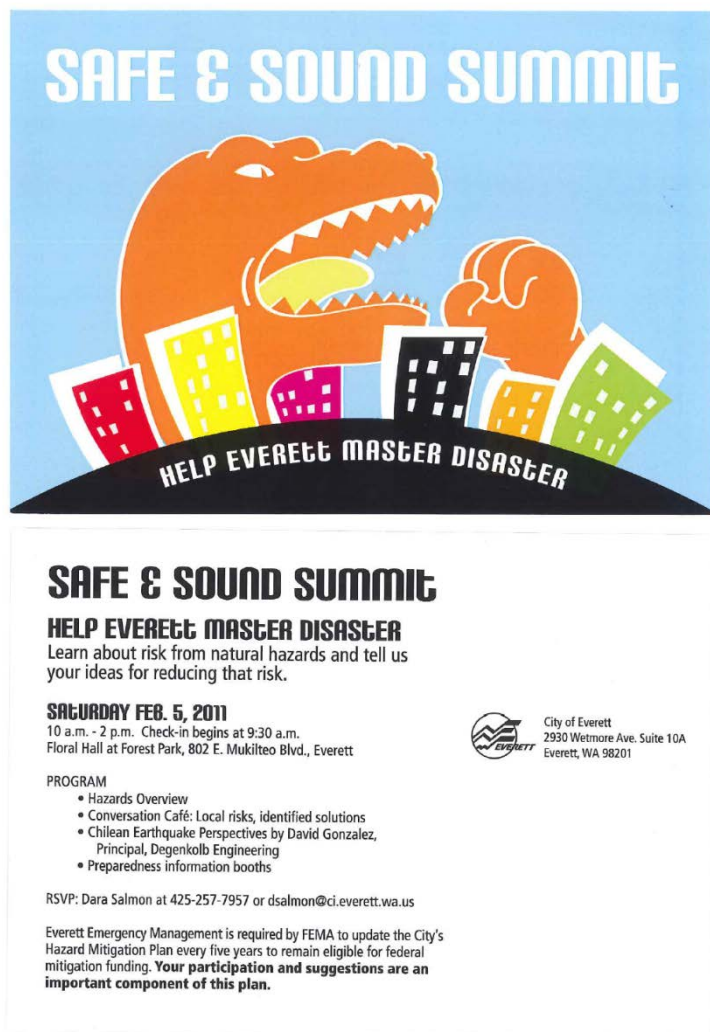


Figure 3: Safe and Sound Summit Postcard (Dara Salmon)

the risk of natural hazards in Everett would be a good tool both to educate the public and to ensure that any good ideas that might contribute to the plan were found. The event was a success, with over 80 community members in attendance and with pages of notes and ideas that have helped the planning team identify risks, strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities in the City of Everett. Many participants also expressed excitement at having the opportunity to be part of a discussion on risks and mitigation.



The Safe and Sound Summit was the primary public event designed to empower citizens to contribute to the design of the hazard mitigation plan's action items and strategies. The meeting format was adapted from The World Café, a deliberative, conversational process designed to bring groups of people together to discuss important questions. For the Safe and Sound Summit, the City of Everett launched a comprehensive outreach and advertisement campaign utilizing city networks,

community organizations, and local media.

The Safe and Sound Summit on February 5, 2011 gathered input from residents on risk reduction strategies to include in the updated Hazards Mitigation Plan. Everett's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) organized the event to bring together residents of the city. Students and faculty from the University of Washington facilitated two group discussions centered on earthquakes and severe storms, two of the hazards identified as high concerns by previous meetings with the HMP Steering Committee and public meetings.



The discussions used the World Café structure, with small discussion groups rotating between tables that focused on different populations' potential response to earthquakes and storms. The first group discussed how individuals and families could deal with risk. The second group discussed what the people would like businesses and organizations to do to in case of a severe storm or earthquake, and the third answered the same question about government. The UW

students and several members of Everett's City staff took notes at each discussion table. Before

the discussions of each risk began, each table group chose a reporter from among the Everett residents to stay at the table and summarize the discussion for the next group. Each discussion round could then build on the discussion of the last round.

Following the event, the project team compiled and summarized the notes from the event and began to create strategies and action items. The project team discussed these strategies and action items with city staff and the departments or organizations responsible for their implementation. During an open house to present the second draft, members of the public reviewed the updated action items, then commented on, edited, added, and modified the items in tandem with project staff. Once finalized, the Steering Committee reviewed the strategies and action items for final approval and inclusion in the completed plan.

Open House

The City of Everett engaged the community to create ideas to reduce Everett's risk to hazards through the Safe and Sound Summit. They then organized those ideas in order to reach consensus on the best methods to reduce risk. The City and Project Team conducted an open house-style public meeting to review those updated strategies and action items on May 12, 2011 from 6:00-8:00PM at Everett Fire Station #4.

The meeting was in an open house format in order to allow an informal event for people who have limited time availability. Citizens could attend for a short period, at any time during the event, in order to review action items, comment, and make edits and suggestions through both comment forms and discussions with event facilitators. The event avoided known barriers to participation such as: a large time commitment, a formal event setting, and specific language requirements. The open house was also in a format at a "human scale", using wall maps and posters that can be examined independently by attendees at a pace they desired. This structure permitted citizens to focus on areas in which they have the greatest interest and to make comments for incorporation into the final plan. It was also important that citizens who had participated in the previous Safe and Sound Summit have the opportunity to assess the draft action items that were created with the information they had provided, and to comment on and make edits to those items.

The project team greeted attendees as they entered the hall and providing a clipboard, pen, post-it notes, and a comment form. Participants could then go at their own pace to examine the maps and action items, and make comments, edits, and additions. Specific edits could be written on post-it notes next to the strategy, and other more detailed comments could be submitted on comment forms. Tables were provided for participants to discuss ideas with both other participants and informed Project Team members. The project team collected comment forms, notes, and other information, and edits made to action items accordingly. The following figures are examples of the posters used for this event.

STRATEGY: EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Strengthen existing innovative public disaster preparedness and mitigation education programs delivered to citizens, especially through programs such as CERT. The Office of Emergency Management has developed a strong 'network of networks' to disseminate information and encourage emergency preparedness trainings. By increasing the types of information available, increasing access to training programs, and targeting new groups for outreach and education, the OEM can strengthen their preparedness programs.

E1: Create educational materials targeted to age-specific groups of residents.

The Office of Emergency Management will create age-appropriate educational programs on natural hazards and preparedness targeted at students in elementary, middle, and high school. These programs may be delivered both at school and through other youth groups such as scouting organizations or faith-based programs.

OEM will organize a "Mitigation Mocha" program similar to the "Green Drinks" group, for young professionals to discuss mitigation and preparedness issues. Create material directed to senior citizens, especially about the dangers of heat waves and other hazards that may disproportionately impact them.

E2: Prepare informational items for residents focusing on 1) clearing sidewalks, 2) heat waves, 3) landslides, 4) water use reduction, and 5) non-structural retrofits.

Clearing sidewalks: Negative incentives, like a fine, for residents who do not clear their sidewalks unless they have registered that they are unable to do so with the city. This could also be done through positive incentives given to people who properly maintain their sidewalks.

Heat waves: Educational materials about the signs and consequences of heat sickness and preventive measures that can be taken should be prepared and distributed, along with a list of places in each neighborhood that may be used as cooling shelters. These shelters should also be identified by a sign during periods of high heat.

Landslides: Landslides may undermine homes and block transportation routes around the ridge on the edge of Everett, and cutting trees may cause or exacerbate sliding in unstable soils. Increased education on the consequences of cutting even a few trees should be disseminated in television and radio formats, as well as through flyers or presentations in neighborhoods in which landslides are a higher-risk event.

Voluntarily decrease water usage- Encouraging a decrease in water uses will encourage residents to develop conservation habits, and ease strain on the water system in case of supply interruptions during a crisis. This program will also mitigate against a potential decrease in drinking water supply caused by the long term impacts of climate change. The city is installing water meters (how are these different from other meters?), and information on conservation could be combined with these.

Figure 4: Sample Strategy Poster (D. Hiebert-Flamm)

RISK: VULNERABLE STRUCTURES

With a large number of structures built before the 1972 imposition of a building code, Everett faces elevated risk from earthquakes. Unreinforced masonry structures and houses not secured to their foundations represent the primary sources of potential earthquake building loss; however, not the only ones. Other at-risk buildings include those built on unstable soils and buildings with inadequate roof-wall connections. Many of these structures are historical and fill important roles within the community.



Figure 5: Sample Risk Poster (D. Hiebert-Flamm)

Though the event worked as planned, it had low attendance, with five participants. Although

there was an error indicating an address several blocks from the actual location, Everett OEM received no feedback that residents were looking, but unable to find the meeting. The day was, however, one of the first beautiful ones of the spring, which may have dissuaded people from attending. In addition, the larger participant group had already been able to electronically review and comment on all the information before the event and may not have found it necessary to attend in order to offer comments that could be made electronically as well. Those who did attend had been heavily involved in the process from the beginning and offered valuable and lengthy contributions to the Project Team.

Moving Forward

By using citizen engagement as a mitigation strategy, involving communities in analyzing and mitigating their own risks, learning from them about previously unrecognized vulnerabilities, and educating them about the potential impacts from local hazards, Everett built a new standard for public participation in hazard mitigation planning. In future processes, Everett and other cities can continue to refine strategies, especially to focus on the increased involvement of members of underrepresented communities. They should go to lengths to request involvement of representatives of those populations on the Steering Committee and/or hold meetings in those communities. Some ways that Everett could do this include:

- Targeted, personal invitations to participate in the Steering Committee can be sent out to members or leaders in underrepresented communities. Follow-ups should be made to these invitations. Everett outreach coordinators should continue to seek out community members even if the initial invitations are declined. Steering Committee involvement of representatives of highly vulnerable populations is the next best alternative to widespread involvement from those communities in regular public participation events.
- Schedule meetings in areas with large underrepresented or at-risk populations. Ensure that meetings are well publicized in these areas through local community channels as well as through traditional ones.
- Locate events in well-known locations at varying times of the day.
- Continue to expand the Network of Networks to include groups not currently represented. Test the Network of Networks to gauge how effective it is in getting information to people (and who, within the city, receives information through it).

Everett's expanded public events, outreach strategies, and vision for public participation as a tool to mitigate and educate provides a foundation on which to continue to develop new public participation strategies. Everett succeeded in its goals of citywide risk reduction and community empowerment to take risk-reducing actions. These successes will be reflected going forward as the hazard mitigation plan is implemented.