

## **SECTION 1: THE PLANNING PROCESS**

Mercer County EMA used a comprehensive, whole community planning process to develop the hazard mitigation plan. This section describes the planning process used and stakeholders involved in the plan development process.

### **1.1 PLAN DEVELOPMENT**

Mercer County's mitigation planning process began in June 2021 and concluded with the submission of a revised plan for state review and federal approval in February 2022. The plan development process included three phases: pre-update planning, planning team meetings, and final plan review.

#### **1.1.1 Pre-Update Planning**

Mercer County's most recent mitigation plan was approved on October 6, 2017 and expires on October 6, 2022. The county received funding for the project in 2021 from the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program through the Ohio Emergency Management Agency. The county solicited quotes from contractors to develop the updated plan and selected Resource Solutions Associates LLC in May 2021.

Upon completion of all necessary grant agreements, contracts, and administrative requirements, the EMA Director and Consultant met to establish a project timeline, review planning requirements, and identify local reference documents to incorporate into the plan. The Consultant collaborated with the EMA Director to develop a comprehensive list of stakeholders representing all areas and jurisdictions to include in the planning process. This planning team list was based on the list developed for the 2017 plan and was updated to include current officials and additional partners and community organizations. EMA Directors from adjacent counties in Ohio and Indiana were also included and invited to participate in the planning process.

#### **1.1.2 Planning Team Meetings**

This planning team worked collaboratively throughout the planning process to provide feedback for the updated plan. Partners from all jurisdictions and sectors and a broad range of community organizations and agencies participated in the process. The complete planning team list is included as table 1-3 later in this section.

#### *Hazard and Risk Identification Survey*

The planning team's work began with completion of a hazard identification and risk assessment survey. The survey was sent to all planning team members by email and was posted on the contractor's website. This extensive electronic survey collected feedback on each of the thirteen hazards included in the plan. Respondents were asked to rate the frequency, response duration, speed of onset, magnitude, business impact, human impact, and property impact. They also identified hazards that, from their perspectives, had worsened or improved, and

those that had the greatest and least impact on their specific jurisdictions. A copy of the survey instrument used to collect this information is included in Appendix C: Hazard Assessment Survey Tool.

*Jurisdiction Work Sessions*

After completing the hazard identification and risk assessment survey, each jurisdiction participated in a jurisdiction-specific work session. A countywide meeting was also conducted and included county and township officials and representatives. The purpose of these sessions was discussing specific impact of hazards, hazard history since the last mitigation plan was developed, and mitigation strategies to include in the updated plan. Table 1-1 includes a complete list of the work sessions conducted throughout the planning process.

**Table 1-1: Jurisdiction Work Sessions**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Purpose/Audience</b>
9/22/21	Coldwater Village Hall	Jurisdiction Planning Meeting
9/22/21	St. Henry Village Hall	Jurisdiction Planning Meeting
9/22/21	Fort Recovery Village Hall	Jurisdiction Planning Meeting
9/22/21	Chickasaw Village Hall	Jurisdiction Planning Meeting
9/22/21	Montezuma Village Hall	Jurisdiction Planning Meeting
9/23/21	Mendon Village Hall	Jurisdiction Planning Meeting
9/23/21	Celina City Hall	Jurisdiction Planning Meeting
9/23/21	Mercer County Administration Building	Countywide Planning Meeting
9/23/21	Burkettsville Fire Department	Jurisdiction Planning Meeting
10/7/21	Rockford Village Hall/Zoom	Jurisdiction Planning Meeting

*Mitigation Strategy Survey*

After participating in the jurisdiction work sessions, planning team members provided additional feedback on the status of the mitigation strategies identified in the 2017 plan. This was done via electronic survey with each jurisdiction responding to a customized survey of their jurisdiction’s mitigation strategies. Respondents assigned a status of complete, ongoing, unchanged, or defer to each strategy. These responses were combined with feedback from the jurisdiction work sessions to identify new strategies to include in the plan. A copy of the survey instrument used to collect this information is included in Appendix C: Hazard Assessment Survey Tool.

**1.1.3 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 January 31-February 11, 2022, 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 February 9, 2022 to provide stakeholders and the community with the opportunity to review and discuss the plan in person with the Contractor and EMA Director. The public was notified of the plan review period through news releases, letters to jurisdictions, posts on the EMA's website and social media accounts, and flyers and notices in county office buildings. 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 and 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.

## **1.2 STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT**

To encourage countywide participation in the mitigation plan, a large group of stakeholders were invited to participate in the planning process. Invitations to participate in the Hazard Mitigation Planning Team were extended to more than 85 individuals representing the following Mercer County partners:

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

Throughout the planning process, more than 50 people contributed by attending work sessions, completing surveys, and providing crucial information and feedback. The complete list of participating stakeholders is provided in Appendix A: Mitigation Planning Team. The planning team's participation occurred over the phases of plan development previously described in this section.

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

### 1.2.1 Jurisdiction Participation

The incorporated jurisdictions in Mercer County all elected to participate in the countywide mitigation plan. Townships were invited and encouraged to participate in all planning activities. The officials identified in table 1-2 served as the primary representative and point of contact for their jurisdiction.

**Table 1-2: Participating Jurisdictions and Primary Representatives**

Jurisdiction	Position/Title	Representative
<b>COUNTY</b>		
Mercer County	EMA Director	Mike Robbins
<b>MUNICIPALITIES</b>		
Burkettsville	Clerk/Treasurer	Glenn Miller
Celina	Safety Service Director	Tom Hitchcock
Chickasaw	Village Works Coordinator	Kevin Drosch
Coldwater	Village Manager/Engineer	Eric Thomas
Fort Recovery	Village Administrator	Randy Diller
Mendon	Utility Superintendent	Randy Severns
Montezuma	Mayor	Steve Fortman
Rockford	Village Administrator	Aaron Temple
St. Henry	Village Administrator	Stan Sutter

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.

### 1.2.2 Public Participation

In addition to jurisdiction representatives, county officials, and community partners, the public was also invited to participate in mitigation meetings and work sessions. Jurisdiction representatives opened the jurisdiction work session to local community members and interested individuals. Countywide meetings were also open to the public and announced through news releases. Officials were encouraged to invite additional employees, officials, partners, or community members to the work sessions and promote the sessions on their websites and social media accounts.

Upon completion of the plan, a public review period was conducted from January 31-February 11, 2022. During this time, the plan was posted on the Consultant's website and accessible to all stakeholders, planning team members, and the community. A printed copy of the plan was available at the Mercer County EMA. The public was notified of this public review through notifications sent to planning team members, letters sent to jurisdictions, news releases to local media, and posts on websites and social media accounts. All notifications included a link to view the plan online, the timeline for public review, and instructions for submitting feedback. Jurisdictions were encouraged to share this information on their own websites and social media accounts.

Within the public review period, a countywide plan review forum was held on February 9, 2022. This forum was open to all planning team members, jurisdictions, community partners, and the public. The purpose of the forum was to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to view and comment on the plan, ask questions, and discuss multi-jurisdictional implementation of the identified mitigation strategies.

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

#### **1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES**

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

The plan incorporates local disaster history and hazard occurrences through September 30, 2021, which is the most current information available from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Storm Events Database. Additional hazard information was provided by the Ohio Emergency Management Agency, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Stanford University Dam Program, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and other federal, state, and private sources.

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

**Table 1-3: Studies, Reports, and References**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Author/Agency</b>	<b>Date</b>
Federal Disaster Declaration Information	FEMA	2021
Auglaize Watershed Discovery Report	FEMA	2011
Upper Great Miami Watershed Discovery Report	FEMA	2011
Upper Wabash Discovery Report	FEMA	2016
National Risk Assessment Community Report – Mercer County, Ohio	FEMA	2022
Grand Lake/Wabash Watershed Alliance Action Plan (WAP)	Grand Lake/Wabash Watershed Alliance	2016
Mercer County Comprehensive Plan	Mercer County Regional Planning	2013
Storm Events Database	NOAA	2021
Mercer County Profile	Ohio Department of Development	2021
Study Plan for the Lower Auglaize River Tributaries	Ohio Department of Natural Resources	2014
HAZUS Earthquake and Flood data	Ohio EMA	2012
State of Ohio Hazard Mitigation Plan	Ohio EMA	2019
Western Ohio Cropland Values	Ohio State University	2014
National Pipeline Mapping System	Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration	2022
United States Census	US Census Bureau	2020
Ground Water Potential Pollution Study	US Geological Service	1989/ 2004 update
Soil Survey of Mercer County	USDA	1979
Census of Agriculture	USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service	2017

## **1.5 PLAN MAINTENANCE**

Plan maintenance is a critical component of hazard mitigation planning. Plan maintenance activities incorporate hazard mitigation considerations into ongoing community development activities, help the EMA engage stakeholders in issues related to disaster risk reduction on a long-term basis, and streamline the mitigation plan update process. The Mercer County EMA will continue to lead mitigation plan maintenance efforts, as they did between the 2017 and 2022 hazard mitigation plans.

### **1.5.1 Annual Plan Maintenance Activities**

Following approval of this plan, Mercer County will continue to monitor progress on mitigation strategies and track hazard incidents and damages. Plan maintenance activities will be conducted using a variety of methods, including annual mitigation review meetings, surveys, and participation in county-wide and jurisdiction meetings. Because it can be difficult to obtain participation in meetings, the EMA may choose to collect feedback from stakeholders through alternate methods including, but not limited to, digital or paper surveys, conference calls, and virtual meetings. These methods may be utilized if the EMA feels they will receive more robust feedback than a traditional meeting.

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

### **1.5.2 Community Participation**

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

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

### **1.5.3 Integration with Community Planning Mechanisms**

Local government participation in plan maintenance activities is a major factor in implementing mitigation strategies and identifying new 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 have a local planning commissions or 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 providing 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 new construction and 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, 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. While emergency management does not have a formal seat on the commission, the EMA Director works closely with the commission to address disaster and hazard mitigation-related issues.

The County Engineer is the floodplain manager. Tax map and GIS services are provided by the County Auditor. The county engineer and additional staff from his office 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 be approved by the Regional Planning Commission before construction takes place and as part of the loan process. Properties must be surveyed, and floodplain status verified. Since 1996, any property utilizing federal funding to build or renovate must have flood insurance if the property is in an identified flood hazard area. Lenders also require any mortgaged property in a floodplain to carry flood insurance.

The county will strive to consider hazard mitigation in all other community planning efforts, especially the comprehensive plan, and include information about hazards, risks, and vulnerabilities in all planning areas. The EMA and Regional Planning will share responsibility for integrating hazard mitigation 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, making mitigation a true community-wide effort.



#### **1.5.4 Documentation of Plan Maintenance**

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

#### **1.5.5 Plan Update Cycle**

The hazard mitigation plan will expire in 2027. With ongoing plan maintenance and documentation, the county should be positioned to submit an updated plan well before the expiration date. To ensure the appropriate timeline is met, formal efforts to update the plan will begin in late 2025. The EMA Director will ensure that the appropriate and necessary steps are taken to complete this process.