

## **1.0 THE PLANNING PROCESS**

The Seneca County EMA utilized a comprehensive whole community planning process to develop this multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigation plan. The process included participation from stakeholders representing the county, municipalities, townships, community organizations, and residents. This section describes the process utilized to develop the hazard mitigation plan and explains how stakeholders were included throughout the process.

### **1.1 PLAN DEVELOPMENT**

Seneca County's mitigation planning process began in June 2019 and concluded with the submission of a revised plan for state review and federal approval in December 2019. In this section, the activities that occurred during each phase of plan development will be discussed. The plan development process included five phases: pre-update planning, project kick-off, risk and vulnerability assessment, mitigation strategy development, and final plan review.

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

Seneca County's prior hazard mitigation plan had an expiration date of January 8, 2020. In August of 2018, the EMA Director submitted a grant application through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to secure funding to update the mitigation plan. The grant was awarded in May 2019, which allowed Seneca County to proceed with their planning process.

Seneca County hired Resource Solutions Associates LLC in July 2019 to lead the plan update process. At that time, the EMA and Consultant met to establish a project timeline, review planning requirements, and identify local reference documents to incorporate in the plan. Because the county's existing mitigation plan expired in January 2020, the planning process needed to be completed within a six-month time frame. This would require an aggressive schedule of meetings and work sessions with stakeholders.

The consultant developed a contact list for the new mitigation planning team. This list was based on the contact list used in 2014. It was updated to include current officials and employees as well as additional partners and community organizations. EMA Directors from adjacent counties were also included and invited to participate in the planning process.

#### **1.1.2 Project Kick Off**

The planning team's role began with an initial countywide planning meeting at the Seneca County EMA on August 22, 2019. During this meeting, the Consultant and EMA Director presented an overview of the project goals, requirements, and timeline. Attendees included jurisdiction representatives, local government officials and employees, and other community stakeholders. During the meeting, stakeholders also participated in a hazard assessment survey to identify the hazards that affect their jurisdiction and the range of damages they experience.

### **1.1.3 Risk and Vulnerability Assessment**

The risk and vulnerability assessment phase focused on research and information gathering. Jurisdiction-specific work sessions were conducted to identify local vulnerability and analyze the impact of incidents on each jurisdiction. From September 23-October 7, 2019, the Consultant and EMA Director met with individual jurisdictions to discuss hazard vulnerability and critical infrastructure protection needs. Participants provided input regarding critical assets and infrastructure, areas with specific or heightened risk or vulnerability, and areas where mitigating actions would have a positive effect on future disaster loss in each jurisdiction. These discussions included vulnerabilities within the specific jurisdiction and Seneca County as a whole. Participants included mayors, administrators, city/village council members, trustees, fiscal officers, road/street department employees, law enforcement officials, fire service personnel, public works and utility employees, and other key employees.

Work sessions were also conducted with officials and agencies with subject matter expertise who could provide highly specific input into the impact of hazards in Seneca County. The subject matter experts consulted included: Seneca County Engineer, Seneca Conservation District, OSU Extension, Seneca Regional Planning, Seneca General Health District, and Seneca County Emergency Services. Sessions with these officials focused on gathering risk and vulnerability information and discussing the impact of disasters relative to each group's specific area of expertise.

### **1.1.4 Mitigation Strategy Development**

Mitigation strategy sessions focused on developing mitigation goals and strategies for each jurisdiction. From October 18-November 26, 2019, the Consultant and EMA Director met with jurisdictions for a second time to update the mitigation strategies from the previous plan and develop new strategies that reflected current risks and vulnerabilities. The strategy development discussion also addressed priority, timeline, and lead agency for each strategy identified.

### **1.1.5 Final Plan Review**

After completing the hazard and risk identification and risk assessment and developing mitigation strategies, the complete draft plan was shared with the planning team and the community for review. A final countywide plan review meeting was held on December 10, 2019 at the Seneca County EMA. This meeting was attended by planning team members representing jurisdictions, special interest groups, agencies, and organizations across Seneca County. The meeting was also open to the public. During the meeting, the Consultant explained the plan's structure and organization and discussed formal plan adoption, and ongoing plan maintenance.

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**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Participating Stakeholders</b>
08/22/19	Seneca County EMA	Project Kick Off Meeting	<b>Countywide Meeting</b>
09/23/19	Bettsville Village Hall	Hazard and Risk Identification	Bettsville
09/23/19	Republic Village Hall	Hazard and Risk Identification	Bloomville Republic
09/23/19	New Riegel Village Hall	Hazard and Risk Identification	New Riegel
09/24/19	Tiffin City Hall	Hazard and Risk Identification	Tiffin
09/26/19	Seneca County EMA	Hazard and Risk Identification	Seneca County Emergency Services Seneca General Health District Tiffin
09/26/19	Fostoria Fire Department	Hazard and Risk Identification	Fostoria Wood County EMA
09/30/19	North Central Ohio ESC	Hazard and Risk Identification	<b>Countywide Meeting</b> Adams Township Advertiser Tribune Clinton Township Eden Township Jackson Township Kansas Fire Department Liberty Township Loudon Township Seneca Regional Planning
10/07/19	Attica Village Hall	Hazard and Risk Identification	Attica
10/18/19	Tiffin City Hall	Strategy Development	Tiffin
10/28/19	Bettsville Village Hall	Strategy Development	Bettsville
10/28/19	Republic Village Hall	Strategy Development	Bloomville Republic
10/28/19	New Riegel Village Hall	Strategy Development	New Riegel
10/28/19	North Central Ohio ESC	Strategy Development	<b>Countywide Meeting</b> Adams Township Eden Township Liberty Township Loudon Township Seneca Regional Planning
10/29/19	Attica Village Hall	Strategy Development	Attica
10/29/19	Seneca Conservation District	Strategy Development	OSU Extension Seneca Conservation District
10/29/19	Fostoria Fire Department	Strategy Development	Fostoria
11/26/19	Seneca County Engineer	Strategy Development	Seneca County Engineer
12/10/19	Seneca County EMA	Final Plan Review	<b>Countywide Meeting</b>

## 1.2 STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

To engage a broad group of stakeholders and community partners in the mitigation planning process, the EMA used a whole community approach when developing the mitigation planning team. An inclusive list of planning team members was developed with the intention of including all jurisdictions and a comprehensive range of organizations and agencies across Seneca County.

### 1.2.1 Jurisdiction Participation

All of Seneca County's incorporated jurisdictions elected to participate in the countywide hazard mitigation plan. Fostoria is located at the juncture of three counties (Hancock, Seneca and Wood). Because the majority of the city falls within Seneca County, the city has traditionally worked with the Seneca County EMA for planning purposes, including the hazard mitigation plan.

For the purposes of plan adoption and potential grant administration, Seneca County is authorized to act on behalf of the townships. Many townships elected to participate in the planning work sessions and contributed significantly to the process. This broad participation ensured that all interests across the county, including rural and suburban areas, were represented.

The officials identified in table 1-2 served as the primary representative and point of contact for each incorporated jurisdiction. The EMA coordinated with these individuals to schedule work sessions.

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

Jurisdiction	Position/Title	Representative
<b>COUNTY</b>		
Seneca County	Regional Planning Executive Director	Charlene Watkins
<b>MUNICIPALITIES</b>		
Attica	Village Administrator	Greg Martin
Bettsville	Village Administrator	John Dabrunz
Bloomville	Water/Wastewater Superintendent	Darin Brown
Fostoria	Safety-Service Director	Deb Hellman
New Riegel	Mayor	Larry Bouillon
Republic	Village Administrator	Jodi Honaker
Tiffin	City Administrator	Dale Thornton

### 1.2.2 Hazard Mitigation Planning Team

To encourage broad countywide participation in the planning process, a large group of stakeholders were included in the planning process. Invitations to participate in the Hazard Mitigation Planning Team were extended to more than 100 individuals representing the following Seneca 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, business and industry, education and academia, nonprofits, social agencies, and the general public
- 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
- 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 general public

Throughout the planning process, more than 50 people contributed to the planning process. The complete list of participating stakeholders is provided in Appendix A: Mitigation Planning Team. The planning team's participation occurred over four phases of plan development: kick-off meeting, hazard identification and risk assessment, mitigation strategy development, and final plan review. The plan development schedule included several rounds of work sessions with additional small group meetings scheduled throughout, as described in section 1.1.2 above.

The EMA provided multiple opportunities for stakeholder participation that considered a wide variety of schedules, work situations, and other issues. Most meeting invitations were sent via e-mail as this was the quickest and most efficient communication method. When necessary, EMA staff 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 then reached out to non-respondents individually to encourage them to participate.

### **1.2.3 Public Participation**

Beyond participation from jurisdiction representatives, county officials, and community partners, the public was also invited to participate in the mitigation planning process. All meetings and work sessions were open to the public. News releases were sent to local media for the kick off and final plan review meetings. Jurisdiction representatives were encouraged to share information about local work sessions with additional employees, partners, and community members. Draft plan documents were shared with the planning team throughout the process. Participants were asked to share these documents with other officials, employees, and residents for feedback.

Upon completion of the plan, a formal public review period was conducted from December 2-10, 2019. During this time, the plan was posted on the Consultant's website and accessible to all participants on the planning team and the community. A printed copy of the plan was also available at the Seneca County EMA. The public was notified of the public review period through notifications sent to planning team participants, letters to jurisdictions, and a news

release to local media outlets. All notifications included a link to view the plan online, the timeline for public review, and instructions for submitting comments and questions. Jurisdictions were encouraged to share plan review information on their websites and social media accounts.

During the public review period, a countywide plan review forum was conducted on December 10, 2019. All jurisdictions and planning team participants were invited to this forum. It was also open to the public to provide all stakeholders and community members the opportunity to view and comment on the plan. It also provided an opportunity to discuss multi-jurisdictional implementation, ongoing countywide participation, and annual review by all jurisdictions in the coming five years.

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

### **1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES**

Research during the planning process included review of existing data, plans, and reports and detailed discussions with stakeholders and subject-matter experts.

Information in the county profile was sourced from various county and jurisdiction documents. This research included information about 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. Jurisdiction websites provided additional local information. The Seneca County Comprehensive Plan provided information about building and development regulations and countywide goals and objectives for community growth. Municipalities provided local jurisdictional documents and websites that confirmed and explained collaboration between jurisdictions and the county. Watershed plans were consulted for information about local rivers, creeks, and streams.

The plan incorporates local disaster history and hazard occurrences through August 2019; this represents the most current information available from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Storm Events Database. Additional hazard information came from the Ohio EMA, FEMA, Tornado History Project, Stanford University Dam Program, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and other federal, state, and private sources. Appendix B: Hazard and Vulnerability Data includes a complete list of all recorded occurrences of each hazard, organized by type.

The vulnerability assessment and risk analysis are based on several information sources. HAZUS projections were used to develop loss estimates for floods and earthquakes. FEMA records contained loss data based on federal disaster assistance provided in the county and the Ohio

Enhanced Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan Draft (2019) provided additional data and explanation. 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**

Document	Author/Agency	Date
American Fact Finder	US Census Bureau	2019
Federal Disaster Declaration Statistics	FEMA	2019
HAZUS Earthquake and Flood data	Ohio EMA	2012
Seneca County Comprehensive Plan	Seneca Regional Planning Commission	2001
Seneca County Floodplain Regulations	Seneca County Commissioners	2008
Seneca County Profile	Ohio Department of Development, Office of Research	2018
State of Ohio Hazard Mitigation Plan Draft	Ohio EMA	2019
Storm Events Database	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	2018
United States Census Quick Facts	US Census Bureau	2019

## **1.4 PLAN MAINTENANCE**

Plan maintenance is an important element of hazard mitigation. Regular plan maintenance incorporates hazard mitigation into ongoing community development activities, provides a mechanism for the EMA to engage stakeholders in issues related to disaster risk reduction on a regular basis, and establishes streamlines the mitigation plan update process over the next five years. The Seneca County EMA will lead plan maintenance efforts and involve stakeholders, jurisdictions, and the community.

### **1.4.1 Plan Maintenance Methodology**

Stakeholder participation is the greatest challenge in plan maintenance. Plan review meetings are often poorly attended, leading to limited discussion of ongoing mitigation issues. Many stakeholders have competing demands on their time and participation in plan review meetings is often a lower priority than other responsibilities. To address this challenge, Seneca County will implement a plan maintenance process that incorporates multiple engagement strategies. The EMA will select the specific strategies based on what is expected to garner the most robust participation from stakeholders. These methods and strategies can include, but are not limited to: countywide meetings at a central location; jurisdiction-based meetings; surveys or questionnaires distributed digitally or in writing; and webinars or conference calls.

### **1.4.2 Annual Plan Review**

At least one per year, the mitigation planning team will be called on to review and discuss the mitigation plan. The first annual update will take place approximately one year after final approval of the plan; these updates will be conducted annually until the formal five-year plan update process begins. As described in the methodology section above, the annual plan review

discussion can be conducted in whatever format the EMA Director deems most appropriate. The discussion will include an assessment of disaster incidents that occurred during the year and the resulting damages and costs as well as any shortages, gaps in capabilities, ineffective loss prevention actions, and mitigation activities that would have reduced losses or eliminated costs. Status reports on any ongoing mitigation projects and an update to each jurisdiction's mitigation strategies and actions will also be included. The EMA will maintain records of these discussions and develop an ongoing list of strategy modifications to be considered in the plan update.

Jurisdictions might also be asked to conduct an internal analysis of mitigation strategies and actions underway or identify strategies that should be considered for the plan update, and assess any disaster incidents that occurred during the year. The EMA Director will maintain this information as part of the plan maintenance process and share each jurisdiction's report with the mitigation planning team.

If the county or any jurisdictions have been impacted by one or more disaster incidents during the year, an in-person session should be considered post-incident to capture any relevant mitigation issues and document any necessary changes to the next plan update.

Along with these review activities, the EMA will review the hazard identification and risk assessment and note any suggested changes or updates to the hazard history, loss estimates, significant community changes, or development issues.

### **1.4.3 Community Participation**

While the EMA is responsible for leading plan maintenance efforts, stakeholder engagement is key to the success of those efforts. The EMA intends to engage the stakeholders who were involved in plan development in ongoing plan maintenance. Without their involvement, ongoing input will not be comprehensive or accurate. The mitigation planning team's role in ongoing plan maintenance activities was explained and reinforced throughout the planning process.

Public involvement is another important component of Seneca County's ongoing mitigation work. All ongoing mitigation planning activities will be open to the public and promoted through news releases, websites, social media, and other appropriate mechanisms. If surveys and digital tools are utilized to collect feedback from stakeholders, these documents will be also be made available to the community. The EMA Director will review any feedback received from the public and maintain documentation of public participation.

#### **1.4.4 Integration with Community Planning Mechanisms**

In Seneca County, multiple agencies and organizations are involved in community and economic development. These entities work together for the betterment of Seneca County and will be involved in implementing the hazard mitigation strategies identified in this plan.

The Seneca Regional Planning Commission is responsible for planning for and developing land use regulations, infrastructure, and economic growth for the benefit of Seneca County. Jurisdictions in the county choose to participate in SRPC's programs and services and pay an assessment fee for those services. Participating jurisdictions have the opportunity to appoint representatives to the 13-member board. SRPC's responsibilities include: maintaining the county's GIS system; enforcing subdivision regulations; administering the Community Development Block Grant program; managing economic development grants, revolving loan funds and reinvestment area; transportation planning, and community and land development planning. SRPC also maintains the county's comprehensive plan. The current plan was published in 2001. A new plan is in process and is expected to be published in early 2020.

The Tiffin-Seneca Economic Partnership is a non-profit public-private partnership that leads economic, downtown, and community development for Seneca County and the city of Tiffin. The organization has four staff members, a 26-member board of trustees, and more than 60 members representing public and private organizations. The city of Fostoria is served by the Fostoria Economic Development Corporation. This organization works with partners in Fostoria to promote economic growth and business development.

Through the work of these organizations and elected officials in the county and jurisdictions, community development occurs. The EMA supports community development by collaborating with local officials and participating in committees and workgroups. The EMA Director works to incorporate disaster preparedness and hazard mitigation issues in development practices through engagement with these stakeholders and partners. The EMA also collaborates with partners across the county to plan and prepare for disasters, including public safety organizations, schools and educational institutions, social service agencies, and others. The EMA serves as Seneca County's primary voice on these issues to the county commissioners and jurisdictions across the county.

While the county's development-focused agencies are responsible for leading economic and community development efforts, these activities are a partnership between jurisdictions and community partners across Seneca County. Elected and appointed officials participate on committees and workgroups, representing the interests of their organization, providing input, supporting the efforts of other organizations, and making community development a countywide effort. As is true of many rural communities, Seneca County is large enough to have the resources to successfully develop the county but small enough that officials typically know one another and have positive working relationships.

**1.4.5 Documentation of Plan Maintenance**

The EMA will be maintain documentation of all plan maintenance activities, including attendance records for annual review meetings and events, stakeholder contact information, meeting notes and summaries, and recommendations for changes, additions, or deletions to the plan. Results from surveys and questionnaires, annual jurisdiction reports, and comments submitted by the public should also be maintained. All reports, documents, and files can be saved digitally. These records should be shared with the planning team during the next formal plan update.

**1.4.6 Plan Update Cycle**

The newly approved Seneca County Hazard Mitigation Plan will expire in 2025. With ongoing plan maintenance activities, the county should be positioned to submit an updated plan before the identified expiration date. To ensure the appropriate timeline is met, formal efforts to update the plan will begin in mid-2023. The EMA Director will ensure that the appropriate and necessary steps are taken to complete this process.