

Fortifying Essential Services and Facilities

Initiative Summary Statement:

Identify and safeguard essential service operations capabilities post-disaster through new design, relocation, utility redundancy and system support with prioritization given to the assets at highest risk.

Initiative Description:

Objective: In addition to critical infrastructure; County governments, communities, and businesses rely on essential services that are key to response, recovery and re-establishing everyday life after a disaster. This Initiative will promote the region-wide identification and designation of these essential community services, detailing the facilities they rely upon and developing pathways for resilience and mitigation infrastructure upgrades.

Hurricane Ian demonstrated that some essential services require more than traditional infrastructure mitigation approaches to remain viable after a disaster. After Hurricane Ian, gas stations were inoperable due to disruptions to internet access needed to make a sale. Bank closures meant that some community members were unable to access money and other financial services after the storm. Lack of access to capital can make staying in a community difficult, even if there are no immediate dangers to life and safety. As part of an essential service identification process, the County will promote the use of a Federal Emergency Management Agency framework called “Community Lifelines,” that helps communities better identify dependencies that impede service restoration. Lee County area communities can then consider developing criteria for prioritizing projects that will have the greatest impact.

Together, regional stakeholders will strategize on identifying funding sources and identifying opportunities to work across jurisdictions and share best practices or provide technical support.

Need: Nationally, there is a lack of funding for resilience upgrades that protect essential public services needed to get communities operational in the weeks and months after a disaster.

From the Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Action Plan: “Community resources were closed, some for many months, due to damage to homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, the local behavioral health crisis stabilization unit, and libraries.” Having many of these essential services offline for such an extended amount was detrimental to the recovery and caused increased hardship for vulnerable populations.

If community members or businesses are unable to access money, they may be unable to stay in the community even if there are no immediate dangers to life and safety.

Not everything that is important for a community can be described as critical. Understanding that there is a range of significance is an important step as the region begins to identify and categorize facilities and systems into tiers like, critical, essential, and necessary. Incorporating these definitions into plans and policies before identifying, prioritizing essential and finding unique pathways to resources for different tiers is part of the process for the region, as a whole, may want to undertake.

Efforts to support residents with access and functional needs as well as families with members with developmental disabilities like Autism, should be considered a priority in this planning process.

Regional Approach: Recovering from and preparing for a disaster takes the whole community's effort; the County essential services are both interdependent and cross jurisdictional. County area communities can utilize the Community Lifelines approach to working with residents and stakeholders to identify essential services and understand how they rely upon areas like power, transportation, and access to water.

When weaknesses are found, some improvements may be able to be covered in local Capital Improvement Plans (CIP); others may be eligible for funding through Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) or CDBG-DR. The unmet need of the County's infrastructure systems resulting from Hurricane Ian will require a regional approach and coordinated effort.

As mentioned in the Hardening Critical Facilities and Systems Initiative, specific infrastructure sectors, both public and private, can work with Lee County Public Safety as they assess response to recent events, and plan and strategize for future hazards. This will include updates to the "Joint Local Mitigation Strategy" and "the Hazard Identification and Mitigation Assessment."

Key elements of the regional approach include:

- Dividing Essential Services into separate sectors (like Economic Recovery, Communications, Healthcare, etc.) and assembling a diverse set of key stakeholders, both public and private, across the areas to coordinate and identify which services and systems are most important for residents and visitors after a disaster.
- Categorizing supporting facilities into three levels (critical, essential, and necessary).
- Promoting assessments of those facilities to determine vulnerability and their current level of resilience, which will help prioritize resilience upgrades.

- Developing guidance for mitigation and hardening by levels that should be achieved and creating an accessible assessment tool that can be used by the facilities.
- Harden existing or develop new facilities that are resilient to ensure they are available to maintain the continuity of government operations on the County's vulnerable barrier islands such as Sanibel, Captiva, Fort Myers Beach, and Pine Island.
- Developing a strategy on the most effective path forward for some facilities in certain sectors and determining if mitigation can be effective through design solutions and redundancies or if perhaps essential services need to be relocated.
- Developing a tool to assist facilities in creating their own emergency and continuity of operations plans.
- Prioritizing government properties of essential service-supporting facilities could key buildings for their capital improvement plan upgrades.
- Developing or identifying financial incentive programs for private and non-governmental organizations to make resilience upgrades to facilities and systems.

While not all infrastructure is considered critical infrastructure, having the community weigh in on priorities, identifying gaps and a regional approach to solutions will better serve the residents and visitors to the County. Securing resources to perform capital work and managing projects may also pose a challenge to some entities in need and the collaborative effort may yield more efficient results.

Impact: By working together in both preparedness and recovery efforts for essential services, the County will see benefits in blue and gray skies. Specifically, by engaging each sector within essential services leaders will have the value of knowing the community's capabilities and its needs, as well as an enhanced understanding of local complexities. Building relationships among private and public essential services will strengthen the sectors as a whole. More importantly these partnerships can determine the most efficient use of scarce resources and prioritize hardening and mitigating facilities and services (essential and necessary) that keep essential services functioning for the public at large.

Key Considerations:

- Document key issues experienced during and immediately after Hurricane Ian, compare those experiences with recent local events and review standards of preparedness and resilience as well as lessons learned from other communities.
- Continue to analyze best practices and lessons learned across private and public sectors to help reduce risks and hazards.
- Many of the critical infrastructure gaps and issues are being addressed through federal programs like HMGP. Systems and services at the other end of the spectrum have less

resources and capacity to devote to these efforts. They may need more outside support to even participate.

- The range of mitigation needs may be as big as water and power supply redundancies, and as minor as hurricane shutters and an elevated generator. The location of a facility in proximity to water and the age of a building can also be contributing factors to hardening efforts that are needed.
- Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP) for facilities near the water may include plans to relocate in times of crisis to a partner facility inland. Those relationships and agreements should be worked on in advance.

Co-Sponsoring Branches:

Infrastructure, Planning & Capacity, Health & Social Services, Natural Resources, Economic Recovery, and Cultural Resources

Stakeholders:

- County and municipal departmental experts on:
 - Public safety
 - Utilities
 - Transit
 - Solid waste
 - Facilities construction and management
 - Public works
 - Innovation and technology
 - Natural resources
 - Risk management
 - Parks and recreation
 - Strategic resources and governmental affairs
 - Human and veteran services
- Fire Districts
- Police Departments
- School District
- Healthcare systems
- Private utilities and Internet providers
- Non-for -profit essential service providers

Potential Funding Sources:

- Federal Emergency Management Agency

- United States Department of Transportation
- United States Department of Health and Human Services
- United States Department of Energy
- United States Department of Housing and Urban Development
- United States Department of Agriculture
- United States Department of the Interior
- United States Environmental Protection Agency
- United States Army Corp of Engineers
- United States Economic Development Administration
- United States Small Business Administration
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Federal Transit Administration
- Federal Highway Administration
- Florida Division of Emergency Management

Resources:

- [Joint Local Mitigation Strategy \(leegov.com\)](https://leegov.com/2022/08/22/joint-local-mitigation-strategy/)
- [2022 Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment.pdf \(leegov.com\)](https://leegov.com/2022/08/22/2022-hazard-identification-and-risk-assessment/)
- [Lee County Hurricane Ian AAR.pdf \(leegov.com\)](https://leegov.com/2022/08/22/lee-county-hurricane-ian-aar/)
- [Lee County Final CDBG-DR Action Plan 9.19.2023.pdf \(leegov.com\)](https://leegov.com/2023/09/19/lee-county-final-cdbg-dr-action-plan-9-19-2023/)