

Climate Action Advisory Group hosts workshop

By Sheila D. Grant

DOVER-FOXCROFT -- About 30 people attended a Zoom workshop hosted by the town of Dover-Foxcroft and its Climate Action Advisory Group on January 19. While the group was formally adopted as a town committee at the December 13 select board meeting, they have been meeting informally since last summer. Local residents, organizations, town departments and first responders were invited to attend. Presenters included Town Manager Jack Clukey and Jaeme Duggan, director of the Piscataquis County Emergency Management Agency.

Carole Boothroyd, chair of the group, said that they had recently completed a self-assessment aimed at identifying the town's preparedness in the face of potential climate-related emergencies. From the risks identified, the group compiled a list of six items, asking attendees to help prioritize these items. Funding is available to accomplish some of this work through the state's Community Resilience Partnership, Boothroyd said.

The six items attendees were invited to consider and prioritize are:

- Adopt policies that enable, support or incentivize local food production and consumption;
- Identify and protect open space in the floodplain to increase flood buffers and community resilience
- Conduct a community vulnerability assessment that identifies climate risks and vulnerable populations and includes a review of existing plans and policies. Adopt a climate resilience plan that describes high priority strategies for reducing risk and vulnerabilities.

- Develop and implement an extreme temperatures emergency plan, including strategies that increase availability of warming and cooling centers for residents.
- Implement school-based programs to educate students about prevention of mosquito- and tick-borne diseases.
- Improve and protect drinking water and wastewater treatment facilities to reduce physical damage and sustain functioning during extreme weather events.

Dover-Foxcroft Town Manager Jack Clukey said that the process of self-assessment done to evaluate the town's preparedness in the face of potential climate-related emergencies has "given us a chance to go back and look at everything we have done, what we have in place, and perhaps even what we could improve going forward."

The town office does have a generator and could offer heating, and to a lesser extent, cooling centers to citizens during extreme weather.

"Warming is easier because the whole building has heat but we really don't have the cooling capacity in a large area like the gym, so we'd be looking at what other places in addition to the town office would we be able to put into use for cooling," Clukey said.

The town's water system is in relatively good shape in terms of drought, flood or power outages. A project completed last summer raised the level of the town's drinking water source because during drought conditions a few years ago, there was concern that the intake pipe would not remain submerged or be able to take in water. Long-term, the water district is looking for an alternative water source that could be connected to the system.

The town's water and wastewater systems can operate with backup generators during a power outage. And any manhole covers in flood-susceptible areas "are sealed down with rubber gaskets so that they could actually be

submerged in flood waters and not leak through and send a charge of stormwater into the system,” Clukey said.

The movement of emergency vehicles and people during potential scenarios where roads are blocked need to be explored to find bypasses. Alternative water sources if there’s a large fire during a drought need to be identified. While another 100-year flood like the one that swept the region in 1987 is not likely, it is still important to consider whether the 100-year flood line from that time period is the same as the 100-year flood line today.

“The 100-year flood, I’m considering a low probability because by definition it’s supposed to be once every 100 years, but the flooding issue as a whole encompassed the flash floods, the road washouts, the culverts and so forth,” said Clukey.

Another part of the work is “tracking underlying societal characteristics that we see,” explained Clukey. “One of them is that our community is aging and with an aging community we have more issues regarding mobility and limitations on transportation if not everybody is able to drive.” Public transportation resources need to be explored, he said.

“And a big part of climate resiliency that was really brought to our attention from the work of this committee is how broadband is really central to resiliency in that the more people have access to that reliable quality of broadband, it lessens to some degree the need for people to have transportation, whether it’s a doctor’s appointment if there’s some things that can be done with telemedicine, or coming to this meeting. Broadband is an important piece and it speaks directly in a lot of ways to the characteristics of the community.”

Duggan, who just finished her first 90 days as the county’s EMA director, said that what the town does, she also does, but at the county level. She also addressed an audience question about how this area would handle evacuees fleeing some situation in a nearby area such as Bangor.

“If something happened in another county or another large town near us was being evacuated, MEMA [Maine Emergency Management Agency] would be activated,” Duggan explained. “I’d get the message, and then I would speak to all the towns in our county and we’d get the message out and we would find ways to help mitigate all the people coming to our county because, yes, the one bridge across the river in Dover is a problem. There are other bridges, there’s other ways across, but ... it is one of the vulnerabilities in our transportation.”

In terms of flooding, “we talk about ice jams and about dams,” she said. “Dover has a program where you all do have flood insurance, and you have an emergency operations plan for your dams, but your dams might not be the ones that fail. It might be the dams that are upriver. The ice jam might be in Guilford. I take care of that information. I pass it along to you, and then we implement your plans.”

There is also an emergency operations plan for the entire county, Duggan said. “And all the other towns, we encourage, we help them work on their plans. Everything works together.”

Dover-Foxcroft’s water supply is not in Dover-Foxcroft, Duggan said. “And it’s a vulnerability because it’s an outdoor water supply. We work with Homeland Security on things like water supply, and we make sure those are safe.

“We train for Homeland Security. We offer that training. We coordinate trainings for all the emergency managers. We help you work on your emergency operations plan and on your hazard mitigation plans,” she explained.

“The work of this committee has been really helpful because it is about half of your hazard mitigation plan for your town, and that of our county,” said Duggan.

The biggest emergencies likely to occur are related to extreme weather. “We’re having more and more,” said Duggan. “We never really had to talk about cooling centers before in Maine. Very few people up here have air conditioning. A fan usually sufficed, in the summer, in the past. We do now have these days that the elderly or others at risk, if we lose power on those days, they may need some help, so we are talking about cooling centers now all over our county, even up in Greenville, even up in Beaver Cove.”

Duggan said that coordination, information and grant writing are also parts of her job.

“But when the worst happens, we’re here to help things get done and people get the help they need, and then afterwards, we’re here to fill out the forms and to help you fill out the forms, and hopefully get the help you need to rebuild,” she said.

Final votes were tallied by Carol Boothroyd after the meeting. The top priority chosen by workshop attendees was to conduct the community vulnerability assessment; second was to develop and implement an extreme temperatures

emergency plan; and third was to adopt supportive local food production and consumption policies.

Climate Action Advisory Group members include Jan Barton [secretary], Carole Boothroyd [chair], Lesley Fernow, Chris Maas and Dick Swett. They are also seeking new members. Agendas for upcoming meetings can be found at dover-foxcroft.org.