

Town of Southbridge Hazard Mitigation Plan – Executive Summary

Natural hazard mitigation refers to any action that permanently reduces or eliminates long-term risks from natural disasters and severe weather to human life and property. This Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) update for the Town of Southbridge identifies the natural hazards facing the Town, assesses the vulnerabilities of the Town’s critical facilities, infrastructure, residents, and businesses, and presents recommendations on how to mitigate the negative effects of natural hazards. The effort to update this HMP used the knowledge of town officials and residents, and the recommendations presented are realistic and effective steps for mitigating natural hazards.

There have been some key changes in Southbridge’s natural hazard risk since the last plan update. Increased redevelopment pressures in the downtown area near the Quinebag River means future flooding events could affect more residents and businesses. Impacts of climate change are causing more severe heat wave events, which are a challenge for Town residents and users of public buildings that do not have access to air conditioning. Due to aging stormwater infrastructure and clearing of forested land for development, severe thunderstorms and rainfall events are creating erosion and drainage issues. Table E-1 presents the results of the hazard analysis.

Table E-1 Hazard Analysis Summary

Type of Hazard	Location of Occurrence	Probability of Future Events	Impact	Hazard Risk Index Rating
Dam Failure	Small	Very Low	Limited	4 – Low Risk
Drought	Large	Low	Minor	4 – Low Risk
Earthquakes	Large	Very Low	Minor	5 – Lowest Risk
Extreme Temperatures	Large	Very High	Critical	2 – High Risk
Flooding	Medium	Low	Critical	2 – High Risk
Hurricanes	Large	Low	Critical	3 – Medium Risk
Severe Snowstorms / Ice Storms / Nor’easter	Large	Very High	Limited	2 – High Risk
Severe Thunderstorms / Tornadoes / Wind	Small	Moderate	Minor	2 – High Risk
Wildfire / Brushfire	Large	Low	Minor	4 – Low Risk

This HMP sets five goals for hazard mitigation in Southbridge:

1. Build and enhance local mitigation capabilities to ensure the safety and resilience of all community members.
2. Reduce damage to public buildings and ensure the continuity of emergency services.
3. Create and maintain communication methods with the community to build engagement and educate the community about natural hazard risk.
4. Protect and maintain existing community resources, assets, and infrastructure (including natural infrastructure) while pursuing new development and infrastructure projects.

5. Prepare for and respond to climate change-induced natural hazards and extreme weather events.

High-priority mitigation actions listed in the plan are those that build on the success of ongoing efforts and have a high impact. High impact means the action would address multiple natural hazards or benefit a large portion of the town. The plan also prioritizes projects and activities that are easier to carry out because of available funding and public support. These high-priority recommendations include activities such as including hazard mitigation topics in other Town plans and bylaws, and continuing projects with local and regional non-profits for tree planting and other conservation efforts. High-priority infrastructure projects include continuing efforts to increase the capacity of poor-condition stormwater drainage systems throughout town and identifying places to build nature-based solutions in areas with high flood risk. Nature-based solutions include projects or activities that enhance, restore, and protect natural ecosystems.

The HMP is organized as follows:

Executive Summary presents an overview of the plan contents and outcomes.

Section 1 introduces the underlying concepts and purpose for natural hazard mitigation planning.

Section 2 summarizes the planning team members, planning process, and community engagement activities supporting the plan development.

Section 3 contains the regional and community profile, which reviews the Town's social, economic, and land use information. The regional and community profile informs the evaluation impacts of the natural hazards discussed in Section 4.

Section 4 reviews each of the natural hazards identified for the plan. Each subsection defines the hazard, followed by an analysis of the location, previous events, extent of impact, likelihood of future events, vulnerability, and climate change impacts.

Section 5 identifies critical infrastructure and vulnerabilities resulting from the hazards evaluated in Section 4. This section combines information from Sections 3 and 4 to understand how natural hazard risk in Southbridge could potentially affect residents, businesses, and infrastructure.

Section 6 summarizes the existing resources and mitigation actions used by Southbridge, including planning tools, financial resources, and infrastructure projects.

Section 7 presents the mitigation goals and recommended mitigation actions to address the risks and vulnerabilities identified in Sections 4 and 5. Each action has a score of either low, medium, or high priority and is screened for cost, timeline to implement, and overall impact. The table identifies who will complete each action and potential funding sources for each action.

Section 8 describes the how Southbridge will implement the plan, including how often the planning team will meet to discuss progress, community engagement, progress evaluation, and potential funding sources for the mitigation actions listed in the plan.

Section 9 presents references that are used in the plan.