

## Progress Report on Implementation of Hazard Mitigation Plan

**Report Date:** February 16, 2021

**Name of community:** City of Valdez

**Name of plan:** Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan

**Date of adoption of plan:** February 19, 2019

**5 Year CRS expiration date:** October 1, 2024

### Where the Plan is Located:

A hard copy of the City's Hazard Mitigation Plan is kept in the Planning Department at City Hall and can also be found on the City's website at:

<https://www.valdezak.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5183>

### How This Report Was Prepared:

The Senior Planner with responsibilities for the Hazard Mitigation Plan sent a request to several City employees including: Police Chief, Fire Chief, Emergency Manager, Public Works Director, Capital Facilities Director, and Planning Director/Building Official. The information received back from these department heads was compiled into this report. The written report was placed on the agenda for the City Council meeting closest to the anniversary of the adoption of the plan. The City's Public Information Officer issued a press release announcing the evaluation report and publicizing its availability at the Planning Department office and the City's website.

### **Objective 1.1 Improve systems that provide warning and emergency communications.**

On October 15, 2020, the City participated in the Great Alaska Shakeout event. This event was well publicized ahead of time including information concerning the testing of the City's tsunami warning system. The city utilizes Nixle for emergency notifications. Enhancement within Nixle are in progress to organize notification methods for emergency management leadership. Additionally, another Nixle campaign (similar to one conducted a number of years ago) will be launched this year to solicit new Valdez and area subscribers. The city created an Emergency and Disaster Management (EDM) page to the city's website; development of this page is an evolutionary process aimed to educate citizens of Valdez on EDM hazards and warning systems.

We need to perform a greater evaluation of our outdoor warning system and replace key components.

### **Objective 1.2 Reduce the impacts of hazards on vulnerable populations.**

The Emergency Manager is working with a contractor that will provide a system to keep track of vulnerable individuals within the community. This system will assist with emergency response to this population during an event.

Additional work needs to be done to implement this system this coming year.

**Objective 1.3 Strengthen local building code education and enforcement.**

The Code Enforcement Officer, through citizen contact regarding nuisance complaints and land use violations, informs and educates the public as to the Valdez Municipal Code. With assistance from the Building Inspector in identifying, investigating, and determining whether a structure is an unsafe structure (when applicable) Code Enforcement pursues the nuisance abatement process.

The process is ongoing and was largely paused for 2020, as the decision was made to not proactively enforce nuisance issues or violations in which people may be fined due to the economic issues brought about by the pandemic and the overall approach of the City of Valdez to waive fees and attempt to provide citizens with various economic stimulus programs.

Code Enforcement and Planning have partnered together to identify a few commercial buildings that were deemed unsafe. Those properties underwent the necessary legal process and are now City of Valdez property – with the structures slated to be demolished in 2021.

Additionally, the City of Valdez has purchased modules of MyGov for both Planning (building permits and inspections) and Code Enforcement to utilize. This will enable the two Departments to better share information and collaborate on investigations and citizen complaints. It will eventually provide an opportunity to educate citizens via an online platform, as well as provide them with a mechanism to report nuisance properties or ask questions of City employees.

As the City continues to implement additional features of the new software we will update the City's website to provide an interface for the public to submit their permit applications and to remind them of the need for their building inspections.

Once the City adopts new building codes this coming year we will conduct workshops with contractors to discuss the changes to the codes.

**Objective 1.4 Minimize social dislocation and stress.**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Valdez City Schools created the Smart Start Reentry Guidance to reopen the four schools in the city. The guidance includes options for families to be able to choose between at home schooling and in person schooling. The guidance also provides 4 phases to be utilized depending upon the number of active case of COVID-19 in the community.

**Objective 1.5 Strengthen evacuation and sheltering plans/procedures.**

The city recently procured hundreds of new blankets and cots, as well as other supplies, from the American Red Cross (ARC) to supplement existing shelter supplies. Additionally, city personnel have been identified and trained by the ARC to act as shelter managers for the various shelter facilities in Valdez. Non-city facility personnel participated with city employees in the training. Next steps for the managers will be to develop facility-specific sheltering procedures. The city is writing MOUs with city entities to increase sheltering capabilities. The city has also worked with the Alaska Earthquake Center to develop a new Tsunami brochure providing accurate at-glance evacuation information. The brochure has completed a final review and is now going to the printer. Next steps are to create additional deliverables to supplement the brochure (i.e. inundation mapping, evacuation education material, etc.). This information will be combined into a large mailer that will go out to every PO Box in Valdez with a promotional activity that will encourage recipients to digest the content and provide feedback.

We need to enact shelter recommendations in capital improvement plan.

**Objective 1.6 Improve training of emergency responders.**

The City of Valdez Emergency Operations Plan was adopted on October 21, 2020. Additional training will be taking place this coming year for emergency responders to ensure that they know the contents of this plan.

**Objective 1.7 Save lives and reduce injuries.**

An alternate care site was created in the high school gym to be used in the event the local hospital exceeds its capacity. City employees practiced setting up the facility so that it could be created quickly in the event of an emergency.

**Objective 1.8 Form partnerships to leverage and share resources.**

The City has partnered with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under their Planning Assistance to States technical assistance program on a study of Mineral Creek and Valdez Glacier Stream. The final report will be provided to the city early in 2021 and will provide hydraulic modeling and risk analysis of the flood hazards to Valdez along with risk reduction measures that can be implemented.

The City partnered with the National Tsunami Warning Center and the Alaska Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys to host a presentation concerning the tsunami risk associated with a potential landslide event in Barry Arm. Businesses and organizations that operate in the Prince Williams Sound were invited to participate in the presentation.

The City continues to partner with the Alaska Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys in monitoring the Valdez Glacier ice dam and utilizing this information in our emergency planning.

The City continues to partner with the United States Geological Survey to collect additional stream flow data for Lowe River.

**Objective 2.1 Protect critical facilities and services; minimize impacts to operations; and expedite recovery in an emergency.**

Fire Station 1 and the Emergency Operations Center are being located outside of the tsunami inundation zone.

**Objective 2.2 Consider known hazards when identifying sites for new development and construction.**

All new city projects take into consideration known hazards.

As we are updating the city's future land use map that will be included in the new comprehensive plan, we are considering known hazards; such as, avalanche areas, historical river channels, and tsunami inundation zones.

**Objective 2.3 When possible, create redundancies for crucial networks such as water, sewer, power, communications, and digital data.**

Backup power has been implemented at all well houses, the sewage treatment plant, and the mobile connections at lift stations.

**Objective 2.4 Maintain critical facilities and infrastructure in functional order.**

Maintenance Connection work orders and Preventative Maintenance (PMs).

**Objective 2.5 Integrate new hazard and risk information into building and subdivision codes, and land use planning mechanisms.**

As we are updating the city's future land use map that will be included in the new comprehensive plan, we are considering known hazards; such as, avalanche areas, historical river channels, and tsunami inundation zones. We are working towards adopting newer building codes in 2021. The floodplain regulations were updated in 2019 and we will be reviewing and updating them at the same time as the building codes. After the comprehensive plan is adopted the planning department will begin working on revisions to the subdivision regulations and zoning code in order to implement the new comprehensive plan.

**Objective 2.6 Educate public officials, developers, realtors, contractors, land and building owners, and the public about hazard risks and building requirements.**

On October 15, 2020, the City participated in the Great Alaska Shakeout event. There was a significant amount of publicity prior to the event. The planning department mails an annual letter, postcard, or flyer to the land owners with property in the floodplain, mortgage lenders, insurance agents, and real estate offices that explains the risks associated with the floodplain and the need to obtain floodplain development permits. On October 22, 2020 the city hosted a presentation concerning the tsunami risk associated with a potential landslide event in Barry Arm. Businesses and organizations that operate in the Prince Williams Sound were invited to participate in the presentation.

**Objective 2.7 Promote appropriate mitigation actions for all public and privately-owned property within the City's jurisdiction including, but not limited to, residential units, commercial structures, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, cultural facilities, and infrastructure systems.**

The Planning Department continues to offer as a free service to property owner's technical advice for reducing the flood hazard to their personal or commercial property. We promote this service annually through a mailing to property owners within the Special Flood Hazard Area.

**Objective 2.8 Incorporate effective mitigation strategies into the City of Valdez Capital Improvement Project and Major Maintenance programs.**

High risk projects receive higher ranking in the scoring matrix.

**Objective 2.9 Promote post-disaster mitigation as part of restoration and recovery.**

**Objective 3.1 Form partnerships to leverage and share resources.**

The City continues to work with existing partnerships including Valdez Convention and Visitors Bureau, Alaska Small Business Development Center, and Prince William Sound Economic Development District. These partnerships are being utilized to ensure a quick economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Objective 3.2 Continue critical business operations.**

The City enacted a mask mandate to ensure that the city's operations and that local businesses could operate safely during the COVID-19 pandemic. The City created a COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force that recommended to the City Council several short-term and long-term economic tools, including two grant programs to provide funding for businesses impacted by COVID-19.

Additional items from the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force's Report to the Mayor (November 12, 2020) still needs to be implemented this coming year.

**Objective 3.3 Restore non-critical business operations as soon as possible.**

**Objective 3.4 Partner with private sector, including small businesses, to promote structural and non-structural hazard mitigation as part of standard business practice.**

The Valdez Unified Command has engaged with the private sector since March of 2020 to mitigate risk associated with COVID-19. The private sector, and patrons of the private sector, are to be largely commended on their mitigation efforts. Valdez has experienced lessened health and lifestyle impacts from COVID-19 (i.e. Valdez City Schools operates with in-person learning, businesses have the option to be open for in-person dining, and localized travel is not restricted among many others) when compared to other areas of the state, nation, and world because of these successful private sector relationships with the city and community members. This effort serves as a model for future private sector mitigation partnerships with the city. The city is partnering with two separate entities for an annual oil spill drill this summer.

**Objective 3.5 Educate businesses about city-wide contingency planning, targeting small businesses, and those businesses located in high risk areas.**

The City of Valdez recently re-designed its emergency operations plan (EOP) and distributed it to key stakeholders in the community. Efforts for Tsunami education and sheltering will engage businesses in contingency planning. Additional all-hazard “con” planning between the city and business is needed and will be addressed. Contingency planning has been ongoing respective to COVID-19 for nearly a year now.

**Objective 3.6 Partner with private sector to promote employee/employer education about disaster preparedness while at work and at home.**

The city’s new EDM page of the city website will target both citizen and private sector self-reliance. A citywide self-reliance initiative is in the conceptualization stage and has been discussed with some of the members of the city’s Incident Management Team.

**Objective 4.1 Develop hazard mitigation policies that protect the environment.**

Implementation delayed due to COVID-19 Pandemic.

**Objective 4.2 Develop mitigation strategies that lessen the impact of natural hazards on natural resources.**

Implementation delayed due to COVID-19 Pandemic.

**Objective 5.1 Develop mitigation strategies that lessen the impacts of natural hazards on local government services.**

Implementation delayed due to COVID-19 Pandemic.

**Objective 5.2 Develop mitigation strategies that lessen the impacts of natural hazards on the service delivery of local non-governmental agencies, especially the providers of social services.**

Implementation delayed due to COVID-19 Pandemic.

**Objective 6.1 Enhance understanding of natural hazards and the risks they pose.**

The City is continuing to work with the United States Army Corps of Engineers and Alaska Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys to gain a better understanding of local hazards including Valdez Glacier dam outburst events, the potential Barry Arm landslide tsunami, and avalanche hazards.

**Objective 6.2 Improve hazard information, including databases and maps.**

When the Letter of Map Revision, changing the Flood Insurance Rate Maps, became effective in November, the City's GIS system was updated to reflect the new maps and a letter was sent to affected property owners notifying them of the updated maps.

**Objective 6.3 Improve public knowledge of hazards and protective measures allowing individual to appropriately prepare for and respond to hazard events.**

The city engaged citizens of Valdez, and individuals state and worldwide, through social media platforms, press releases, and YouTube to educate on hazards associated with the two major Valdez Glacier separation events that took place over the summer. Three safety videos were created by the city with some from the local private sector (guides) and distributed to this end. Furthermore, alerts and education were conducted with citizens respective of the two annual Valdez Glacier outburst events (early summer and fall). The city became aware mid 2020 of a significant hazard to Valdez and the Prince William Sound (PWS) in the form of the Barry Arm Landslide. The city partnered with a group of state and federal agencies to deliver a presentation to major Valdez stakeholders on the hazard. As a result, organizations such as the PWS Regional Citizens Advisory Council (RCAC) and the city are now included in reoccurring meetings on the Barry Arm with these agencies. The city also connected the RCAC with an opportunity for a board meeting presentation on same. Additionally, the city has committed support to a group of local and global scientists studying slope instability in the entire PWS to develop mapping and identification of other similar hazards that place Valdez at risk. The city has engaged in extensive public information mitigation efforts respective to COVID-19 for nearly a year now.