

I. Introduction

Orange County is blessed with an abundance of rich natural resources, as varied and as vital as the people who live here. This bounty provides the county's residents with a wonderful place to call home, but there are also inherent dangers. From time to time, hurricane winds topple trees, severe winter storms immobilize streets, and heavy rains from thunderstorms cause flooding.

Storms, floods and wildfires are a part of the natural balance of the environment. But when such events occur where people have made their homes and built their businesses, the results can be devastating. Natural and technological hazards can wreak havoc in towns, communities and counties disrupting the flow of goods and services, destroying property and unsettling people's lives.

In recent years, the frequency and impact of natural disasters has increased not because natural hazards occur more frequently but because more people are choosing to live and work in locations that put them and their property at risk. While natural hazards cannot be prevented, local communities can use various ways to reduce the vulnerability of people and property to damage. Communities can reduce exposure to future natural hazards by managing the location and construction of both the existing and future built environment. By using location and construction techniques, a community can mitigate negative impacts and reduce future damage to both human lives and property.

A. Why Hazard Mitigation Planning

As the costs of disasters continue to rise, local governments must find ways to reduced hazard risks to their communities. The efforts made to reduce hazard risks are compatible with community goals; protection of life, health and property for safer communities. As communities plan for new development and improvements to existing infrastructure, mitigation can and should be an important component of the planning effort. This means taking action to reduce or eliminate long-term risk from hazards and their effects.

Hazard Mitigation is the practice of reducing risks to people and property from natural hazards. It includes both structure interventions such as building codes and nonstructural measures such as preventing development in flood areas.

B. Purpose of the Plan

The essential purposes of Hazard Mitigation Planning are: to protect the health, safety, and economic security of residents by reducing the impacts of natural hazards, influence decision-making in both public and private sectors, and prove community eligibility for government aid and grant programs.

The President of the United States, in October of 2000, signed into law the *Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000* (PL 106-390) to amend the *Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Act of 1988* which among other provisions requires local governments to adopt a mitigation plan in order to be eligible for hazard mitigation funding. In June of 2001, the North Carolina General Assembly passed Senate Bill 300: *An Act to Amend the Laws Regarding Emergency Management as Recommended by the Legislative Disaster Response and Recovery*

Commission. Among other provisions, this bill requires that local governments have an approved hazard mitigation plan in order to receive state public assistance funds (effective for state-declared disasters after November 1, 2004).

C. Orange County and the Towns of Carrboro and Hillsborough

Orange County is centrally located in the piedmont of North Carolina and contains approximately 400 square miles. The County includes the Town of Carrboro and Town of Hillsborough, partner jurisdictions on this Hazard Mitigation Plan Update. The 2000 Census recorded a population of 115,531 with 66,330 of these residents in the Towns of Carrboro, Hillsborough, and Chapel Hill. Located in Chapel Hill, a unique feature of Orange County is the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The student population of the university adds approximately 25,000 people to the County's population during the school year. Orange County has several major highways which include I-40/85, US 70, 15/501, and NC 54, 57, 86, and 157. There are portions of three major river basins – Cape Fear, Neuse, and Roanoke - that are located in the county.

The Town of Carrboro is approximately 4.5 square miles and located at the southern portion of Orange County. The 2000 Census recorded a population of 16,782 persons in Carrboro, giving the town the distinction of having the highest population density in the State of North Carolina.

The Town of Hillsborough is located in the central portion of Orange County and is the county seat. The town is approximately 4.3 square miles and boasts a 2000 Census population of 5,446 residents.

The Town of Carrboro and the Town of Hillsborough are located entirely within Orange County. References to 'Orange County' throughout this plan update include unincorporated Orange County, as well as the Town of Carrboro and Town of Hillsborough, unless otherwise noted.