



## The Chairman's Corner

by

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### HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN

With the enactment of the federal Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, designed to expedite the funding process for local projects through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) when an ongoing issue presents itself, a plan is in place to address those types of situations.

The Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 refers specifically to flood mitigation assistance, pre-disaster mitigation, the repetitive flood loss program, the severely flood loss program, and the hazard mitigation grant program.

Over the course of recent history, it's become increasingly apparent that weather-related events have the potential to put a major strain on the budgets of counties, towns, and villages, and Columbia County and local municipalities haven't been spared from the consequences of bad storms. Over time, specific locations may begin to presents chronic concerns.

As the plan itself states, "Floods, severe storms, hurricanes, and severe winter storms are among the hazards that can have a significant on Columbia County."

Organized by New York State and with the process overseen by the county Office of Emergency Management, in 2013 the county's 581-page Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan was adopted. In 2018, the plan was updated. Now, the update process is again underway.

Along the way, said county Emergency Management Director David Harrison, Jr., "each municipality in the county has the opportunity to identify weather-related threats or manmade disasters. There are two aspects to it. One is identifying threats and planning for them, and the other is, once you have a plan that is accepted by New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, it goes on to FEMA and it opens up the ability for the municipality to apply for grant funding."

"When a state or federal state of emergency is declared," explained Emergency Management Deputy Director Henry Swartz, "a certain percentage of the funds goes into the hazard mitigation fund. That goes to pay for projects that are repeatedly being repaired in communities. If the same road or culvert, for instance, continues to wash out and money needs to be put into rebuilding it every time there's a storm, the money is there to go in an make a permanent fix so FEMA is not continually paying for the same damage."

Part of the trick, Deputy Director Swartz pointed out, is the grant funding opportunity only becomes available at certain times, and “at that point you have to have your project basically ready to go, including the pricing -- you have to keep updating it all the time so the prices are up-to-date.”

Furthermore, said Director Harrison, the availability of grant funding, is tied to how many disasters FEMA is faced with in the United States during a given cycle.

Director Harrison and Deputy Director Swartz indicated that, in the recent update process, there has been 100 percent participation from all county municipalities, which means they are going through the process of obtaining information and planning.

That’s good news. Columbia County will be prepared!