

Larimer County Resiliency Framework

Background

While natural disasters are nothing new to Colorado, Larimer County communities experienced significant fire and flood events in a short period of time between 2012 and 2013. In June 2012, the High Park Fire burned nearly 90,000 acres, destroying 259 homes and racking up some \$97 million in insurance claims. At the same time, another fire started near Estes Park that destroyed an additional 20 homes.

In September 2013, Larimer County was heavily impacted by the 2013 Front Range floods. These floods were the costliest disaster in Colorado's history. In Larimer County, 47 homes and seven commercial buildings were destroyed, with another 338 homes and 25 businesses severely damaged. Many canyon roads were damaged, isolating communities like Drake, Estes Park, and Glen Haven. The floods occurred at the peak of the tourism season, which impacted local economies; this was only made worse when the 2013 federal government shutdown closed Rocky Mountain National Park.

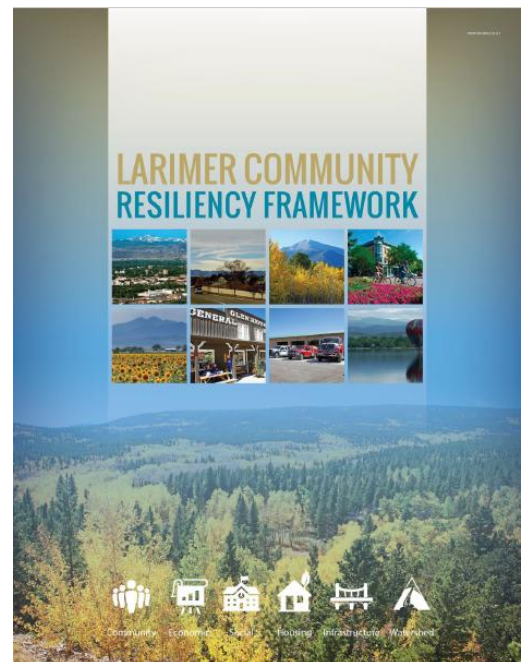
[Disasters like the fires and floods will occur again](#). Larimer County communities developed the Larimer Community Resiliency Framework, a regional resiliency framework to build local resilience to future shocks and stresses. The process was part of a program piloted in partnership with the State in conjunction with its application for HUD's [National Disaster Resilience Competition](#) (NDRC), and was completed during an intensive 6 month period from August 2015-February 2016. Modeled after the State's [Resiliency Framework](#), the Larimer County framework established a collective vision and goals for the county, participating municipalities, and community-based organizations, examined existing conditions across [six resiliency sectors](#), and developed actionable strategies and priority projects to address vulnerabilities.

Challenges

The Larimer Community Resiliency Steering Committee, took the lead on developing the resiliency framework. The committee faced a number of challenges throughout the process:

- Because this was a new process, there was no guide. The committee used the State's Resiliency Framework as a reference.

Project Partners: Big Thompson River Restoration Coalition; Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed; City of Fort Collins; City of Loveland; Colorado Department of Local Affairs; Colorado Resiliency and Recovery Office; Estes Valley Watershed Coalition; ISET-International; Larimer County Voluntary Organizations Active in Recovery; Larimer County Departments, Elected Officials, and Key Staff; Larimer County Long-Term Recovery Group; Larimer Community Resiliency Steering Committee; Little Thompson Watershed Coalition; Town of Estes Park



Challenges (con't)

- Developing a comprehensive framework that reflects the needs of Larimer County meant bringing together members of the community that traditionally may not work with one another. The group included representatives from the county, municipalities, community organizations, the private sector, and various stakeholders.
- The timeline for developing the resiliency framework needed to be expedited due to its tie to the NDRC application. In the future, the team would benefit from a longer process and the opportunity to engage more with stakeholders and the community.

Framework Development

Step one in the Larimer Community Resiliency Framework process was forming a steering committee to lead the process. In August 2015, representatives from a wide variety of stakeholders from local, state, and federal governments; community-led coalitions; non-profit organizations; and private businesses formed the Larimer Community Resiliency Steering Committee. This group led the development of the Larimer Community Resiliency Framework, with support from the State's [Resiliency and Recovery Office](#), and a multi-disciplinary consulting team.

The Steering Committee held two multi-day planning sessions to gather a broad range of stakeholder input for the framework. At the first planning session in late August, 2015, participants reviewed existing plans, created a vision for community resilience, developed goals and strategies, and documented potential shocks and stresses the county faces. On the second day, the Steering Committee members further developed the vision and goals, and explored potential ideas and projects with a focus on regional and cross-sector benefits.

The second intensive planning session was held two months later. During the second intensive session, the planning team had four main objectives:

1. Review and validate the identified shocks and stresses, community vision, goals, and strategies;
2. Explore any potential new ideas for community resilience;
3. Assign ownership to identified resiliency projects; and
4. Build a "roadmap" that establishes a path forward to community and regional resiliency.

The Steering Committee met one final time for a framework review session in December, 2015. This was a half-day event to gather comments and feedback confirming that the framework reflected the community's input and considerations.



Outcomes and Benefits

The Larimer Community Resiliency Framework was completed in February 2016. The Larimer County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution formally adopting the resiliency framework's goals in May 2016. With the formal adoption, Larimer County's Office of Emergency Management took over coordination of the framework and implementation of its projects.

The framework is not a standalone plan, but rather was built on the momentum of existing planning efforts within Larimer County, including:

- 2016 Larimer County Hazard Mitigation Plan Updated (December 2015)
- Larimer County Strategic Plan Update (2013-2018)
- Larimer County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (2015)
- Unmet Needs and Community Fragility Study (December 2015)

The framework is meant to complement existing efforts, finding ways to build resilience into ongoing activities to reduce vulnerabilities to shocks and stresses. The resiliency plan is not an exhaustive list of actions that will burden the county. Rather it is a plan that compliments existing initiatives, collaborates with community projects and works to build upon and enhance the community's vision for a more resilient Larimer County. The resiliency framework is a living document that will be updated as projects are completed, and adjusted as needed to meet the changing needs of the community and region.

The framework has provided a number of benefits for Larimer County in its pursuit of becoming more resilient:

- ***An actionable path for success.*** The framework contains specific, stakeholder-developed projects and actions the county and Larimer County communities can take. These actions identify project owners and make clear which County departments need to be involved.
- ***Increased collaboration.*** The cross-sector nature of the framework and projects create new opportunities to work across sectors, departments, and levels of government for a more holistic approach towards community resiliency.
- ***Buy-in from leaders.*** When Larimer County Commissioners adopted the Framework's goals, the county demonstrated its commitment to resilience and the methodology behind developing the framework.

A number of projects are currently underway to address the strategies and goals laid out in the Larimer County Resiliency Framework:

| Sector | Strategy Goal | Current Status |
|--|---|---|
| Community | Develop an outreach and education program throughout Larimer County to increase resilience for the next disaster. | Larimer County's Larimer Connects Program is involved in identifying cultural, social, and economic factors that affect response in a disaster to inform better community planning. |
| Economic | Allow for diversity in growth management and economic resiliency while supporting and protecting our natural environment. | Larimer County has started the process of updating the county Comprehensive Plan to look at innovative land-use planning. |
| Community | Increase the number of Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) trainings. | The City of Fort Collins is the lead for the CERT Training sessions. They have increased the number of classes held each year and Larimer OEM assists in teaching the courses. |
| Natural Resources/ Watersheds | Collaborate and support integrated multi- jurisdictional forest management. Link forest thinning projects to biomass reuse opportunities. | Larimer County has partnered with the Big Thompson Conservation District on a Healthy Forest Initiative, including fuels reduction projects in Larimer County. |
| Infrastructure | Develop a clear hierarchy of needs in infrastructure repairs, upgrades, and installation. Identify potential weak or choke points in infrastructure and develop mitigation strategies and/or education. | Using information under development from the new floodplain mapping efforts , Larimer County will assess bridge capacity along mainline arterial roadways and consider improvement needs. |

Lessons Learned

Lori Hodges, Larimer County's Director of Emergency Management, provides a few key lessons learned during the Framework development process:

- ***Get the right people involved.*** Ask around to make sure you have the right people participating. You may think you know who's right to be involved, but you may be missing key voices.
- ***Don't let the framework sit on the shelf.*** Too often plans are made and not acted on. Don't just write the framework, but ensure that it will be implemented. This include clearly identifying processes around implementation, as well as maintenance and updates.
- ***Identify ownership.*** It is critical to get the framework and project's ownership from the community or jurisdiction.

Funding

Funding for the framework development was provided by the Colorado Resiliency and Recovery Office through Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Funds.

For more information on the Larimer Community Resiliency Framework and projects within, contact Lori Hodges, Larimer County's Director of Emergency Management, at hodgeslr@co.larimer.co.us