

Case Study - Flood Mitigation Options for Amor

Background

Amor is a small rural town with a population of 13,000 people built on a flood plain. During the recent 3 years Amor experienced significant and record breaking flooding causing over 500 homes to be inundated, and in last event, one woman was killed while attempting to cross a flooded causeway. The flood was described as a 1 in 200 year event with the equivalent of 1 million bottles of coke falling from the sky every second (yes every second!).

Flood recovery events have been problematic due to the scale of the impact and insufficient volunteers in the early days. Some people in the outlying areas were not checked for at least a week as the main focus was on the town centre. There was insufficient temporary housing and so a large number of residents have moved away.

Insurance companies have been slow to pay claims and are not initiating any new policies until some mitigation strategies are in place. Insurance premiums have increased ten (10) times their previous rates from 3 years ago. Some residents were paying in excess of \$2000 per month.

A year ago the local authority commissioned a flood study, and the investigation of a range of mitigation options. Three hundred (300) residents participated in a public forum where possible mitigation options were explained by the hydrologists. Residents were frustrated at the forum as they could not understand or hear the speakers well due to heavy rain falling on the venue roof!!

Current Context:

Residents have become increasingly frustrated and angry due to the slow action in the community recovery efforts, no news about what mitigation options are going to be pursued, and continued development occurring in known flooded areas. Some residents have resorted to creating mini levees around their properties and one significant business person (and ex-Mayor) has built up a “flower bed” around their large motel complex that residents are condemning as it is causing potential flooding for other nearby residents.

A group of six (6) residents have rallied together to form an action group and have organised a public meeting this Sunday encouraging residents to speak their mind about the apparent lack of action and anger about what is happening with informal levees and continued development.

Council is in constant talks with the other governments about imminent funding rounds for flood mitigation projects.

Your perspective:

You have been brought in by the council to assist in engaging with the community now that the flood model is complete and a shortlist of 10 mitigation options have been evaluated. Council wants the community to understand the flood model and give input on the detailed options.

Appendix A

You have just finished presenting to the council meeting your methodology for engaging the community about the flood study and shortlisted flood mitigation options. As you are packing up your things the Mayor comes over and advises that the local Action Group are coming in to address the council (informal session) . Apparently the Deputy Mayor had arranged this and the Mayor felt that could not block it. He asked you to stay and help with the meeting.

Eight residents file into the room. One woman is demanding that the flood information just presented to council (in confidence) should be given to them to give out at their Public Meeting coming up this Sunday. Another resident is advising the Mayor that they no longer want him to come to the Public Meeting so that residents can speak freely about their concerns and issues. The Action Group doesn't want their process to be overshadowed by the Mayor's presence.

The Mayor turns to you to ask your view on giving the information to the group now.... What do you do?

Appendix B

Over 100 residents met on a Sunday morning for 4 hours and prepared a 12 page submission with many accusations and questions posed to Council. A request for a meeting with council to discuss the accusations and responses to their questions is being sought.

In the meantime residents have gone to the on-line forum just established on council's website and posted a range of demands and issues reflecting the long list of angry claims that have arisen from the meeting:

- 3 years of flooding and still no action – other communities who had experienced similar flooding at the same time already had their levee built by now!
- Why haven't the council cleaned out the creeks? If they had, the extensive flooding might not have happened!
- How could council continue to allow development in flood prone areas – wasn't this just adding to the problem?
- How can we trust the information from the hydrologists? They don't live here! How do we know that they have the right information – computer modeling is only guess work!!
- Why isn't council considering a dam to the north? That would provide a water supply when we need it and flood protection?
- Why is council favoring only the better off people in their fancy houses and we pensioners in the lower parts get nothing!
- Why is council considering a levee that isn't going to work and will cause worse flooding for a number of residents on the other side? Can we sue council if that is the case?
- The proposed levee idea is not going to work as the built up highway and railway are acting as barriers and causes flood waters to back up into the town – the levee will just add to the problem not ease it!!

Activity:

Imagine you have arrived at work on Monday morning and are greeted with the news that the above thread of comments and issues have been posted on the online forum – the CEO is wanting a strategy of response and your Director has just called you in to discuss

- Consider what is happening? What's the trend? What's the escalation about - are you understanding the issue?
- Decide on what strategy may be appropriate ...and act quickly
- Consider language and tone of response
- Consider what might be the ongoing implications of your actions?
- Ensure you follow through ...