

Outreach Activity 6: Public Opinion Survey & Results

An integral element in hazard mitigation planning is broad public participation. Information provided by residents and stakeholders can illuminate local hazard concerns, gauge a community's awareness and preparedness for hazards, and inspire innovative solutions to reduce impacts of future hazard events. As online public opinion surveys are a highly accessible mechanism for gathering qualitative and quantitative data to inform the planning process, the Advisory Committee published an on-line survey hosted by SurveyMonkey.com.

The survey was promoted through the Town's website, two newspaper articles, posts on a number of Facebook pages, and project posters hung in high pedestrian traffic areas in Town and sent out to the School Community and other groups. The survey was also publicized through emails sent to various groups including the 14 local government & school district groups and the 36 agencies and organizations outside of Westerly's governmental structure listed in **Appendix 2-3**.

The survey was accessible from November 22 - December 15, 2022 and had a total of 204 respondents. Survey results were used by the Committee to help guide and focus mitigation planning efforts.

Summary of Survey Results:

The vast majority of the survey respondents were Westerly residents (90.1%), with over half of the respondents residing/working in voting district 3604 (southwest portion of Westerly). A significant portion of Voting District 3604 the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA), which is comprised of the VE or AE/A Flood Zones. This may in part account for over a third of the respondents residing in the SFHA (37%).

Most people were extremely concerned about **Coastal Flooding & Coastal Erosion** (51%) and then **Wind-Related Hazards** (40%). The weighted score produces the following ranking:

Rank	Hazard	Weighted Score
1	Coastal Flooding/Erosion	4.16
2	Wind-Related	4.01
3	Vector-Borne (Ticks/Mosquitoes)	3.40
4	Winter-Related	3.28
5	Inland Flooding	3.16

Rank	Hazard	Weighted Score
6	Drought	3.06
7	Respiratory (Flu/Coronavirus)	3.00
8	Heat	2.82
9	Wildfire	2.41
10	Earthquake	1.44

The majority of participants (165 out of 204 – or 81%) indicated that either they or someone in their household had been negatively impacted by a natural disaster while living or doing business in the Town of Westerly. More people were impacted by **Wind-Related Hazards** (59%), **Coastal Flooding/Erosion** (46%), **Influenza/Coronaviruses** (40%), and **Winter-Related Hazards** (36%).

With regard to which of the Town's resources might be most at risk from natural hazards over the next two decades, the weighted score produces the following ranking:

Rank	Category	Weighted Score
1	Infrastructure	3.64
2	Environmental	3.54
3	Structural	3.50
4	Economic	3.28

Rank	Category	Weighted Score
5	Cultural/Historic	2.90
6	People	2.52
7	Governance	2.45

In terms of communication preference, respondents indicated their top 3 preferences for receiving information about what to do BEFORE a disaster were email notification (76%), text messaging (71%), and Town website (43%). In terms of communication DURING/AFTER a disaster, the top 3 preferences were text messaging (83%), email notification (73%), and Town website (48%).

Respondents indicated that they take a number of steps to prepare for natural hazard events. Over **75%** of the respondents indicated they have purchased a homeowners/renter's insurance policy, installed smoke/carbon monoxide detectors, and kept gutters clean and pointed downspouts away from their house/business. Over **50%** have signed up for CodeRED, purchased and know how to use ABC class fire extinguishers, regularly remove dead/dying trees or vegetation from the yard, grade lawn away from house/business, and don't allowed mulch to sit up against siding.

The survey generated 65 responses to the question of what should the Town of Westerly do to mitigate the impacts from natural hazards. These responses have been included in their entirety (refer to Question 7). Some of the key take-aways are:

- Limit construction in high risk areas (coastal zones, floodplains, wetlands) & retreat from high risk areas (using plans & policy/ regulations)
- Conduct more education & outreach
- Maintain & upgrade roads & storm drains
- Move or protect critical infrastructure (including burying electric lines)
- Implement nature-based solutions (dunes, living shorelines, etc.) to replace structures in vulnerable areas
- Create a sea level rise (SLR) preparedness plan
- Reduce impervious surface in Town
- Construct sewer in flood-prone areas and create a septic system monitoring program
- Maintain and upgrade erosion protection for structures (seawalls, etc.)

Following is the Survey introduction and questions along with a summary of the responses.

Westerly RI - Hazard Mitigation & Flood Management Plan Public Opinion Survey & Results

We need your help!

The Town of Westerly is working to become more resilient to flooding and other natural hazards. The Town is currently preparing a Hazard Mitigation & Flood Management Plan (HM&FMP) to identify and assess our community's risks, and determine ways to effectively minimize and manage those risks. More information about the Plan can be found on the Town's website: <https://westerlyri.gov/546/Hazard-Mitigation>

We'd like you to share your opinions and participate in the planning process. Please take this quick SURVEY to help us better understand your hazard concerns. Your input will help guide and focus our mitigation activities with the goal of lessening the impacts of future hazard events for you and your family.

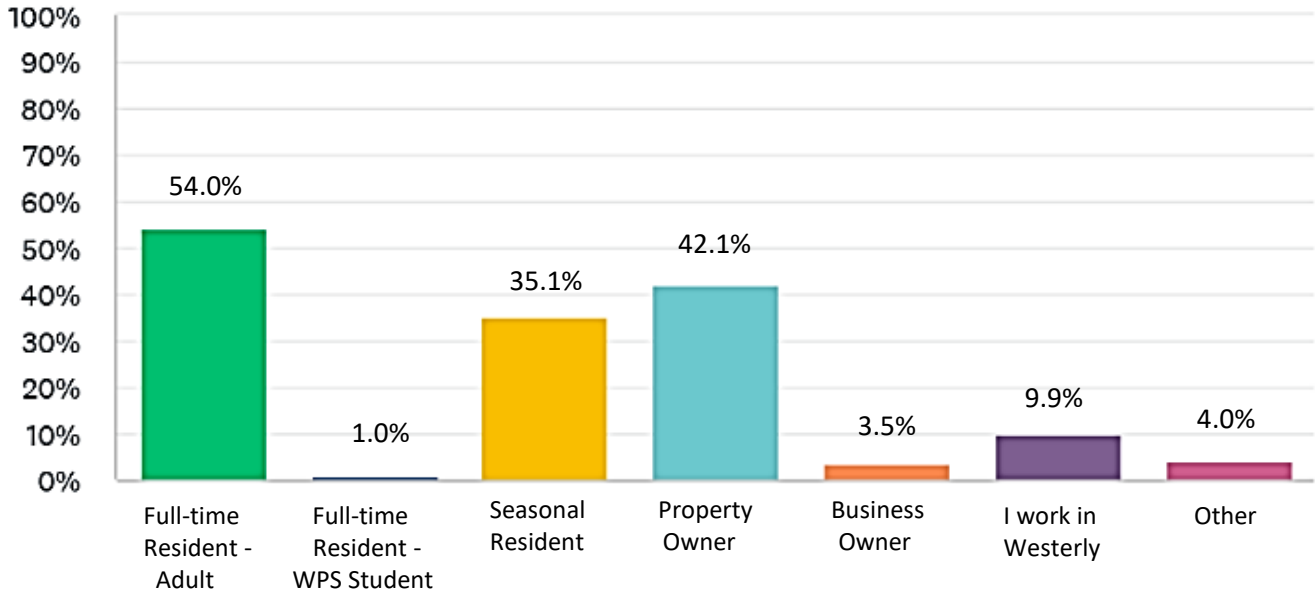
The survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete. Although we encourage you to answer all of the questions, the survey does allow for questions to be skipped.

Thank you for your input!

Mitigation is the effort to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters. Effective mitigation requires that we all understand local risks, make hard choices, and invest in long-term community well-being. Good planning before, during, and after disasters can protect our health, our daily ways of life, and promote equity.

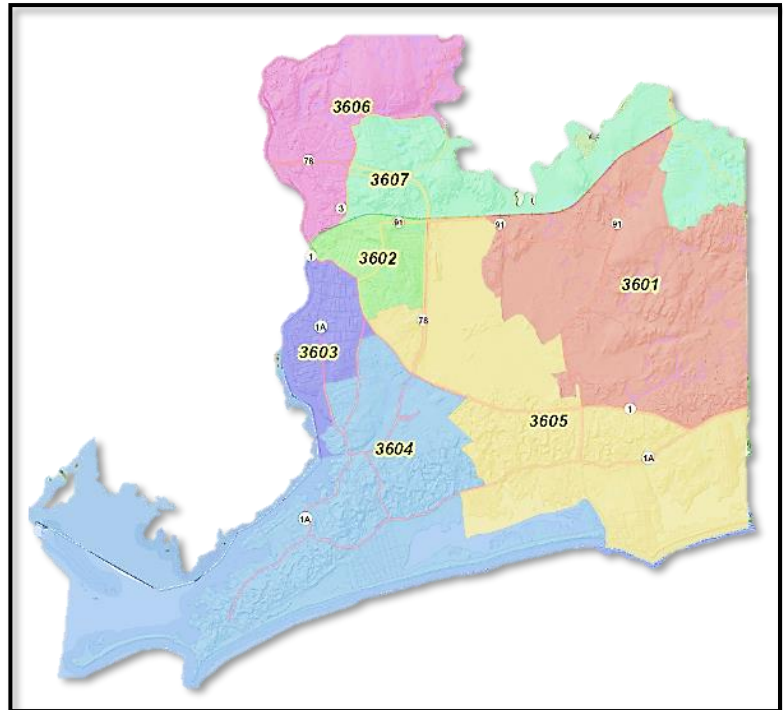
- FEMA

1. What is your connection to the Town of Westerly? Please check all that apply.

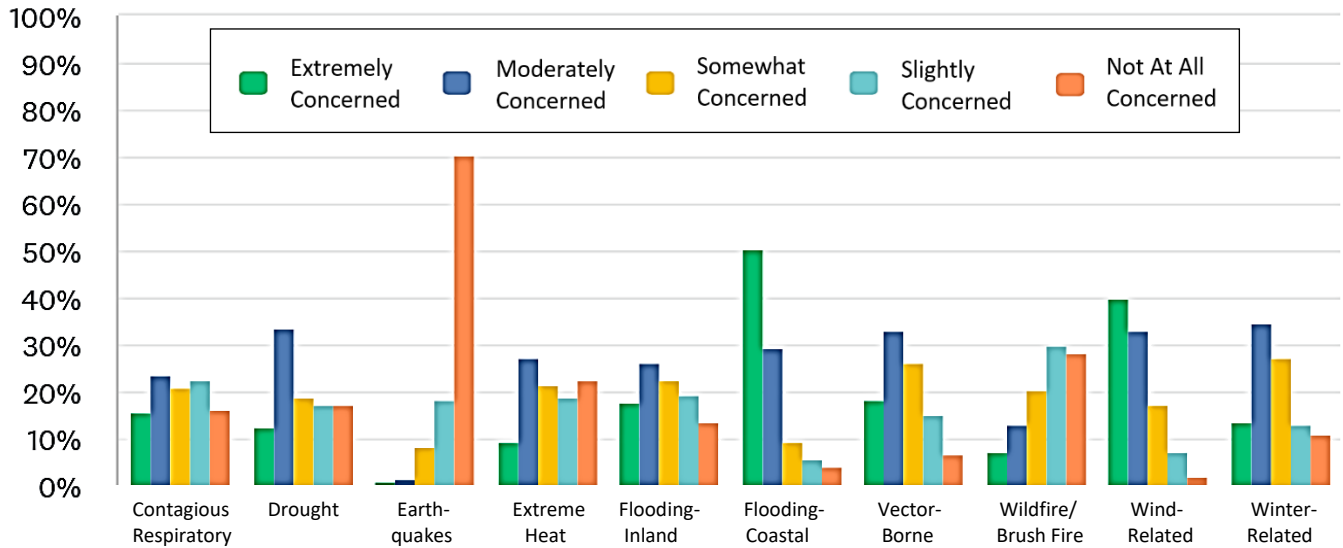


2. In an effort to determine if the responses to the survey represent constituents Town-wide, please check in which voting district your home or business is located. If you are not sure please approximate based on the map provided.

- Voting District 3601 – 3.0%
- Voting District 3602 – 6.0%
- Voting District 3603 – 6.5%
- Voting District 3604 – 57.2%
- Voting District 3605 – 12.4%
- Voting District 3606 – 3.5%
- Voting District 3607 – 4.5%
- I do not live/work in Westerly – 7.5%

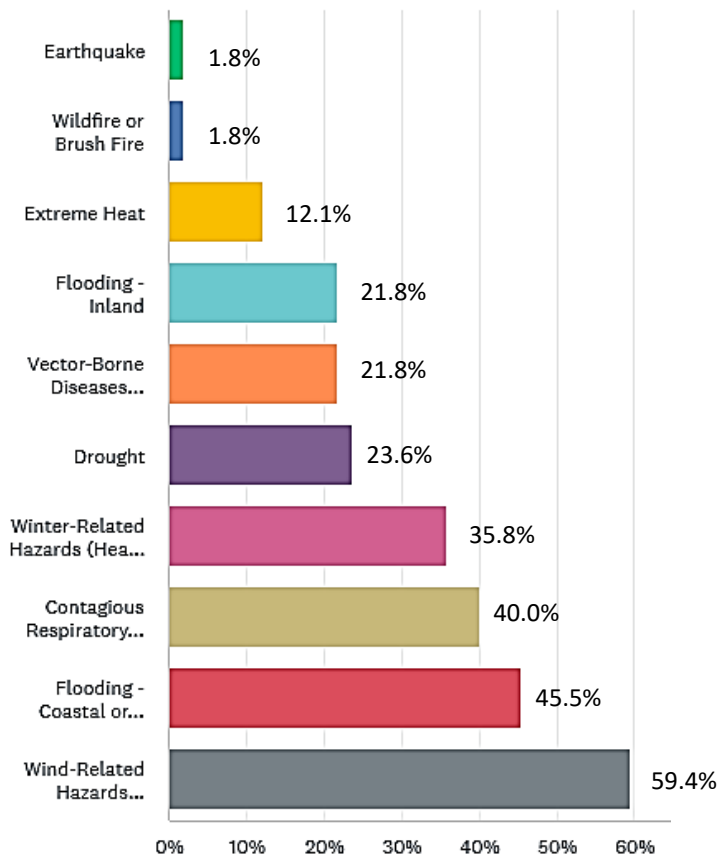


3. Please rank how concerned you are about the following natural hazards.



	EXTREMELY CONCERNED	MODERATELY CONCERNED	SOMEWHAT CONCERNED	SLIGHTLY CONCERNED	NOT AT ALL CONCERNED	TOTAL
Contagious Respiratory Illness Caused by Influenza Viruses or Coronaviruses	15.9% 32	23.9% 48	20.9% 42	22.9% 46	16.4% 33	201
Drought	12.5% 25	33.5% 67	19.0% 38	17.5% 35	17.5% 35	200
Earthquake	1.0% 2	1.5% 3	8.6% 17	18.3% 36	70.6% 139	197
Extreme Heat	9.6% 19	27.3% 54	21.7% 43	18.7% 37	22.7% 45	198
Flooding - Inland	18.0% 36	26.5% 53	22.5% 45	19.5% 39	13.5% 27	200
Flooding - Coastal or Coastal Erosion	50.5% 102	29.7% 60	9.4% 19	5.9% 12	4.5% 9	202
Vector-Borne Diseases Transmitted by Ticks or Mosquitoes	18.3% 37	33.2% 67	26.2% 53	15.3% 31	6.9% 14	202
Wildfire or Brush Fire	7.5% 15	13.1% 26	20.6% 41	30.2% 60	28.6% 57	199
Wind-Related Hazards (Tropical Storms and Hurricanes, High Winds, Tornadoes)	39.8% 80	33.3% 67	17.4% 35	7.5% 15	2.0% 4	201
Winter-Related Hazards (Heavy Snow, Ice, Extreme Cold)	13.9% 28	34.8% 70	27.4% 55	12.9% 26	10.9% 22	201

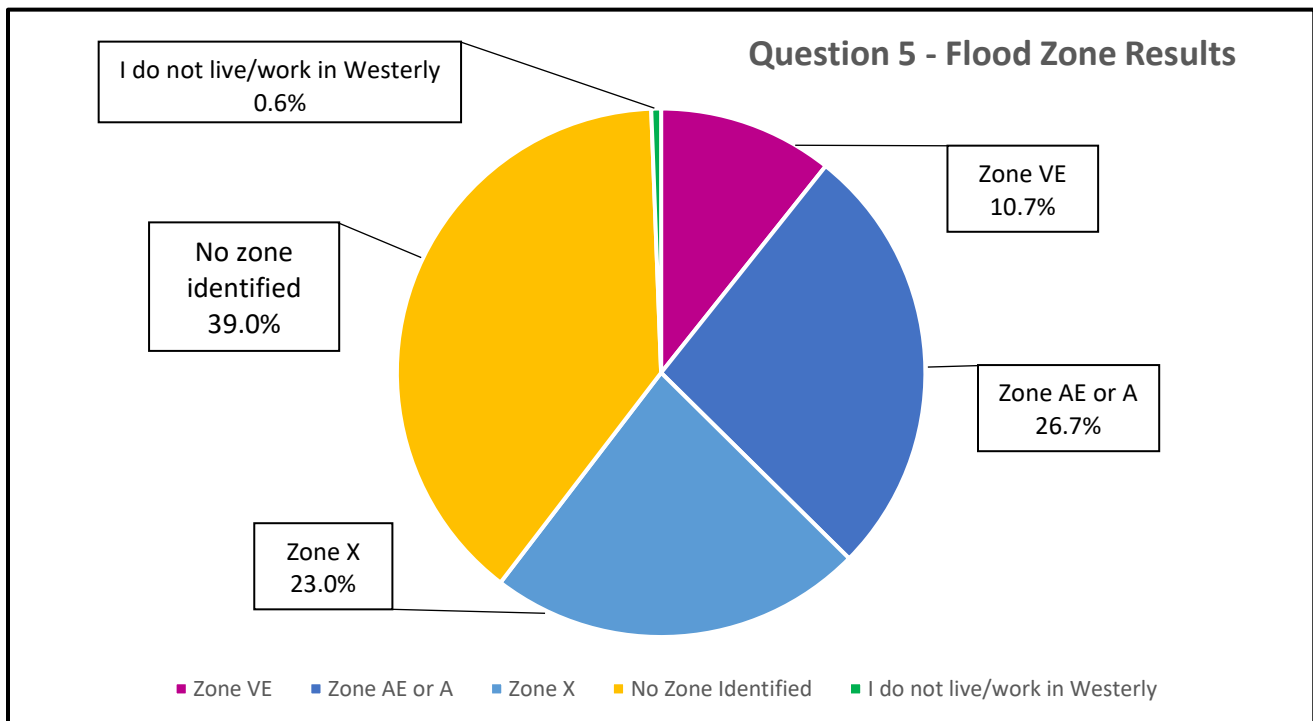
4. Have any of the following types of natural hazard events negatively impacted you or someone in your household while living/doing business in the Town of Westerly? Please check all that apply.



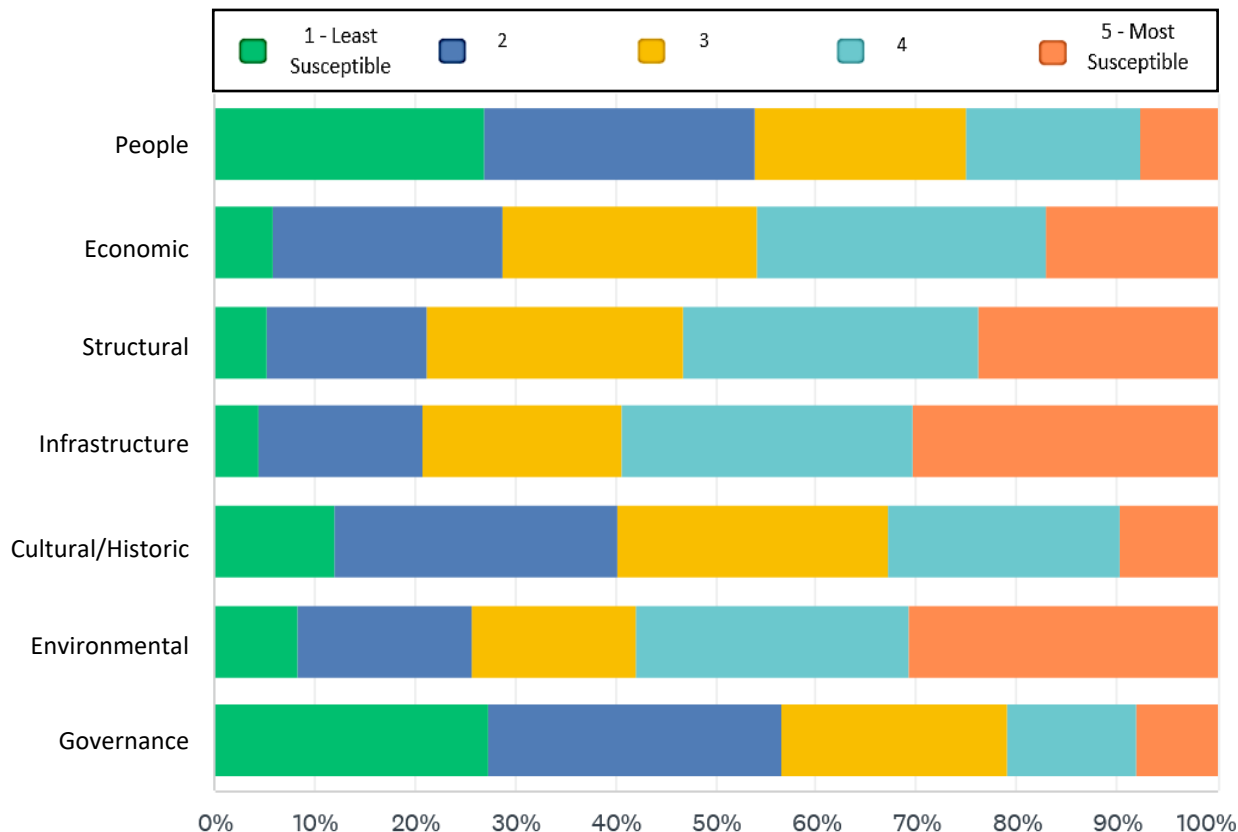
5. Following the steps below, please determine if either your home or business is located in a FEMA Flood Zone.

Steps:

- Click the Link – Westerly GIS Map
- Near the top left of the page, select “Search” (binocular icon) and enter your house # and street name and then click the find button
- The map will show your property card – click “Zoom to GIS”
- Near the top right of the page, select the drop down menu that says “Map Layer” and at the bottom of the list check the box to the right of “FEMA Mapping”
- Identify if your property is in the VE, AE, A, X flood zone (If it is difficult to tell, zoom out a bit using the minus button at the top left of the page)
- A legend identifying those four flood zones has been provided below



6. Which of the following Town resources do you think may be harmed by natural hazards in the next two decades? On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being most susceptible), please rate each category based on how vulnerable/susceptible you think it is to potential impacts from natural hazards.

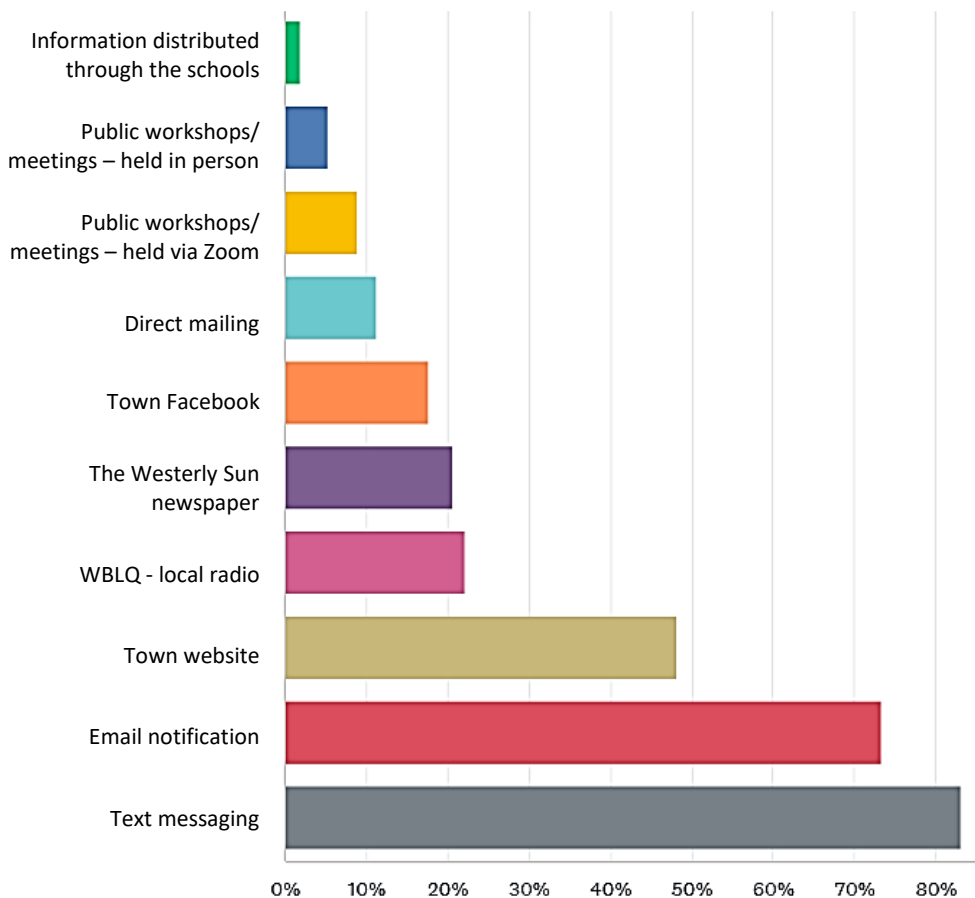
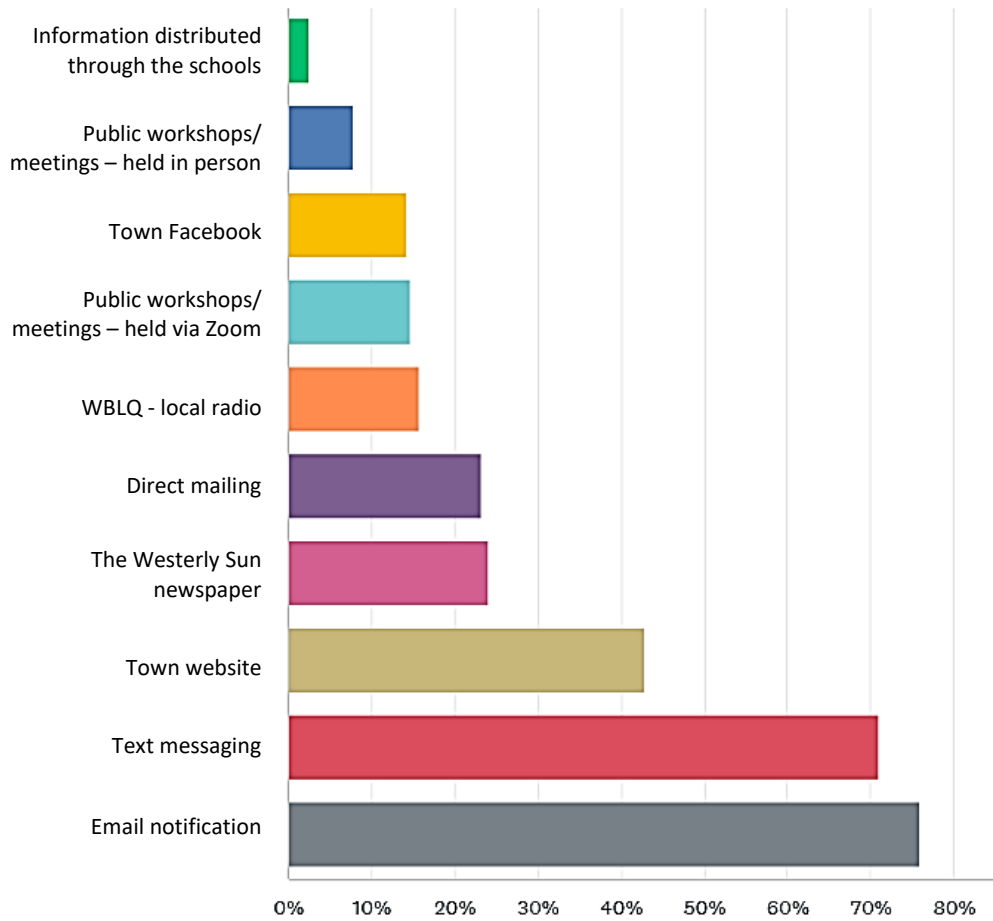


	1 LEAST	2	3	4	5 MOST	TOTAL
People: Loss of life, injuries, compromised health	27.0% 54	27.0% 54	21.0% 42	17.5% 35	7.5% 15	200
Economic: Business interruptions/closures, job losses, etc.	6.0% 12	22.9% 46	25.4% 51	28.9% 58	16.9% 34	201
Structural: Damage to public and private buildings	5.4% 11	15.8% 32	25.6% 52	29.6% 60	23.6% 48	203
Infrastructure: Damage to roads, bridges, utilities, etc.	4.5% 9	16.3% 33	19.8% 40	29.2% 59	30.2% 61	202
Cultural/Historic: Damage to historic sites	12.1% 24	28.1% 56	27.1% 54	23.1% 46	9.5% 19	199
Environmental: Damage, contamination, or loss of forests, wetlands, floodplains, etc.	8.4% 17	17.3% 35	16.3% 33	27.2% 55	30.7% 62	202
Governance: Ability to maintain order and/or provide public amenities and services	27.4% 55	29.4% 59	22.4% 45	12.9% 26	8.0% 16	201

7. OPTIONAL - What should the Town of Westerly do to reduce the Town's potential harm from natural hazards in the future?

Please note: Because of the tremendous response, the 65 comments received for question 7 have been included in their entirety at the end of the survey results (after question 11)

8. To assist the Town in better communicating about what to do **BEFORE** a disaster, please select the top three (3) methods by which you would prefer to receive information.



9. To assist the Town in better communicating about what to do **DURING/AFTER** a disaster, please select the top three (3) methods by which you would prefer to receive information.

10. Which of the following steps has your household/business taken to prepare for a natural hazard event?

Please check all that apply. My household/business has:

****Table shows the number of people who checked each item**

# of people	My household/business has:
169	Purchased a homeowners/renter's insurance policy
124	Signed up for CodeRED emergency alerts through the Town of Westerly website or this direct link: CodeRED (if you do it right now – it counts!) CodeRED is an emergency notification service by which Public Safety can notify residents and businesses by telephone or cellular phone about emergency situations. The system is capable of sending messages to specific neighborhoods or the entire community.
103	Purchased and know how to use ABC class fire extinguishes
50	Prepared a disaster supply kit (for the first 72-hours of a disaster) with some or all of the following: basic medical supplies; food and water for people and pets; plates/cups/utensils/manual can opener; cash; change of clothes/shoes; list of prescriptions; list of key contact numbers; flashlight with extra batteries; whistle; face masks; hand sanitizer; toilet paper and other toiletries; plastic sheeting and duct tape; garbage bags and plastic ties; wrench/pliers; blankets; solar-powered cell phone charger
38	Purchased flood insurance through National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)
38	Discussed with my family/employees an emergency plan and have a designated meeting place or a check-in procedure should our home/business need to be evacuated
28	Purchased flood insurance through private insurer
8	Discussed the benefit of some of the above items with landlord/condo association/neighborhood organization

11. Has your household/business taken any of these additional steps to prepare for a natural hazard event?

Please check all that apply. My household/business has:

****Table shows the number of people who checked each item**

# of people	My household/business has:
179	Installed smoke/carbon monoxide detectors
151	Kept gutters clean and pointed downspouts away from my house/business
136	Regularly remove dead/dying trees or vegetation from the yard
109	Graded my lawn away from my house/business (to minimize pooling of water adjacent to the structure)
95	Not allowed mulch to sit up against my siding (mulch attracts termites and other pests)
79	Installed a backup generator
68	Installed high impact windows or doors to withstand high winds
62	Planted trees or other vegetation to reduce heat on my property
46	Elevated some or all of the following above flood level: electrical outlets/switches, generator, water heater, washing and drying machines
42	Installed a sump pump or foundation vents
35	Installed a rain garden, removed pavement/other hardscape, or implemented other measures to manage rain water on my property
26	Applied flood-proofing coatings or sealants
17	Elevated my home/business on pilings or piers

**** 7. OPTIONAL - What should the Town of Westerly do to reduce the Town's potential harm from natural hazards in the future?**

Total Comments - 65

- 1) restrict building new waterfront structures since high tide is getting closer to Atlantic Ave and other water front streets.
- 2) Assess the Town Beach Pavilion area erosion and address the need to potentially move the beach pavilion away from the shore.
- 3) More public education - teaching students and the community about the science of climate change and sea level rise and how to take action in our homes and on our property to minimize the threat of natural hazards.
- 4) It's really quite simple - the town of westerly and in fact the world population far exceeds natures ability to support the population we need to discourage more and more people shortages of water, climate change, food insecurity, peak oil, health hazards, inadequate infrastructure (of all types, poverty, overwhelmed federal, state and local budgets, crime, war, and on and on ...all boils down to too many people on the planet competing for natural resources- try and fix that and stop trying to coddle every challenge with other people's money spending on absurd challenges takes away from spending on opportunities for excellence
- 5) Consider raising the bulkheads and coastal areas. Run sewer to areas prone to flooding.
- 6) enforce fema rules
- 7) Consider a surge gate between Osbrook Point and Watch Hill.
- 8) Provide public assistance to those who are endangered by natural hazards.
- 9) Don't allow building/rebuilding flimsy structures right on a barrier beach.
- 10) Limit construction in vulnerable coastal zones. Stop issuing permits for filling swamps/wetlands. Advocate more tree trimming around power/cable lines. Advocate/fund additional dredging of coastal salt ponds.
- 11) Long term plan for Main Street south, downtown and possibly bits of Wilcox Park.
- 12) Quit allowing over development. Quit giving variances for more house on lots. Quit allowing property owners to fill in wetlands. Do a deep dive and prepare a sea level rise preparedness plan.
- 13) Hold regular drills/practice plans involving government, EMS, FD, PD, hospital.
- 14) Better protection of pervious surface; monitoring of waste/septic systems (put in public sewer system by the beach and wetlands); protect the beaches from erosion; address flooding; better public communication and awareness of hazards; Town Council to make it a priority
- 15) Upgrade and make higher sea walls.
- 16) put public sewers in the misquamicut fire district such that sewage is not released into the environment during storms.
- 17) Stop being influenced by the corrupt corporate media
- 18) Limit new construction especially on or near wetlands
- 19) Work on flooding in the Breen Road area.
- 20) Make sure roads and highways are maintained
- 21) Wetland preservation. Less concrete and asphalt on roads, parking lots and driveways
- 22) Address flooding happening now in WH and up the river to the Town.
- 23) Nothing, government should stay out of trying to control natural hazards. They are out of their control and frivolously waste tax dollars that could be better used in the community.
- 24) Stop building/paving. Promote the wetlands conservation.
- 25) Use Common sense.
- 26) Ban rebuilding in flood zones or along shoreline if property is severely damaged.
- 27) Continue to have the superb first responder services that it does
- 28) Plan and mitigate where possible.
- 29) Rapid response team to clean up and repair the inevitable hurricane damage. Public safety plan post hurricane to prevent looting and fly by night contractors. Dredge anywhere necessary to mitigate possible flooding.
- 30) Continue efforts to improve Watch Hill's protection from severe flooding. Seawall may need work. Holdredge parking lot and boaters lot are vulnerable. The Watch Hill Fire District has been very helpful with crisis planning.
- 31) Reinforcing and increasing the sea wall in Watch Hill.
- 32) As a community, Westerly should do as much as it can to implement actions that take climate change into consideration.
- 33) Invite Mother Nature for coffee and have a heart to heart.
- 34) Move or protect critical infrastructure to ensure quick restoration of utilities, safety after a natural hazard. Make efficient and practical evacuation plans where needed.
- 35) Do not rebuild on natural hazard sites - let nature take its course. However, I do believe the beaches and shoreline need to be maintained (minus structures).
- 36) Bury the electric lines... build the bridge back over the tracks, have plows ready to go, have small Katz ready for sidewalk. Stop salting unnecessarily.
- 37) enforce building codes. Do not develop areas at risk.
- 38) Regularly help with dune maintenance in public areas and also offer to help with the same on private property (bring in sand, plant beach grasses)

- 39) Honor the Comprehensive Plan of 2020 regarding building, additions on existing properties, truly limit variances to existing properties, especially in high density areas to "least remedy...", follow zoning guidelines as they align with (*please note: although it appears this comment has been cut off, this is the entirety of the comment*)
- 40) Urge lawmakers to vote to support common sense environmental laws.
- 41) Minimize rebuilding of destroyed structures on coast; develop plans for coastal retreat
- 42) Establish information processes to monitor
- 43) Protect wetlands
- 44) Include indigenous community members in the conversation. They will have unique and valuable perspectives and offer a number of necessary solutions.
- 45) Insure infrastructure is maintained and modernized. Ensure townsfolk have multiple locations to shelter in case of an emergency. Doing public outreach programs (meet and greets) with westerly emergency responders to help build trust in the community.
- 46) Upgrade improvements to electric/gas infrastructure and water/sewer system. Consider implementing a paid full time emergency service for fire/rescue and ambulance.
- 47) I don't see how viruses are classified as natural hazards. Should be a different survey.
- 48) Slow development, enhance capacity of natural landscapes to absorb flooding and other weather related risks. Establish riparian buffers along streams and rivers. Institute a tree tax. Encourage more open space in overall development plan for municipality
- 49) Better plowing and winter maintenance of roads and sidewalks. Better care of the roads in general, most of them are pot hole city.
- 50) The storm drains should be better maintained/cleaned out
- 51) Improve emergency management program to educate the public and prepare emergency responders better. Build a more resilient coastal area.
- 52) It's too late for Westerly. They've gone woke
- 53) Work with nature, not fight nature: implement projects that REMOVE vulnerable structures that require costly maintenance, favoring projects that build resiliency through nature-based solutions (EG living coastlines vs sea walls)
- 54) As being done all over USA to drain flooded wetlands so they can absorb and release slowly storm floods, remove the dam at Potter Hill. Funds are available at no cost to the Town.
- 55) Develop a long-range policy of gradual retreat from the coastline and especially within flood zones.
- 56) Identify and assess high-risk town property and infrastructure. Develop short-term (18 mo.), intermediate-term (2 years), and long-term (5 years) hazard prevention and mitigation plan/s.
- 57) Remove impervious surfaces, site buildings accordingly
- 58) Better Communication and public education
- 59) Minimize rebuilding in barrier beach areas after storm disasters. There are beachfront properties that should not have been allowed to be rebuilt/repared after Sandy
- 60) Remove obstructions at stillman ave bridge
- 61) *Better regulate flood prone areas and possibly adopt regulations that prevent building and prevent REBUILDING in high hazard locations. *Adopt plans to deal with sea level change including provisions for retreating/removing/relocating infrastructure from these areas. *Review and improve evacuation routes and ensure there are multiple routes available from primary areas in case one or more routes become impassable. During one storm, East Ave was blocked by downed trees and Beach Street was flooded by tidal surge by the Westerly Yacht Club. Perhaps, it would be appropriate to raise Beach Street's roadbed elevation at this area since it's a main egress thoroughfare. *Acquire property above and adjacent to the flood elevation/expected sea level rise boundaries to provide a perimeter of undeveloped land that may be of use later if coastal retreat becomes necessary. *Start funding a "rainy day" account now to deal with critical infrastructure needs that may arise later during hazard events. Ensure legislation is in place to prevent the funds from being raided for non-related uses.
- 62) retreat from the coastline
- 63) Enforce coastal construction standards for storm erosion prevention and mitigation
- 64) Develop retreat plans with the state and federal government that allows for the purchase of properties in the Salt Pond and beach areas as well as areas along the river and little Narragansett Bay. Most of our coastal businesses and residences are seasonal and in areas we should not encourage development.
- 65) The Town should continue to diligently pursue opportunities to implement mitigation activities in the form of policies (ex. protecting wetlands and floodplains); projects (ex. stormwater management - including tree wells, shade structures at public facilities), and educational/outreach programs.

Thank you for participating in the Town of Barrington Hazard Mitigation & Flood Management Plan Public Opinion Survey. Your responses are very important! Survey results will be used by the Project Steering Committee to guide and focus mitigation planning efforts. A summary of the survey results will be included as an Appendix to the Plan.