

City of Venice 2024 Hurricane Survey

Summary of open-ended survey questions

This summary includes issues expressed by residents that were not captured in the multiple-choice questions as well as suggestions for improvement. Issues that were referenced most often are highlighted in bold. Summaries of the multiple-choice survey questions are in “2024 Hurricane Survey Results_Part 1.pdf”.

Question 10. Describe how to improve the City service you needed most to be better prepared BEFORE the storms.

- 1) Most were satisfied or had no comment
- 2) **Preparedness & Communication**
 - a) **Messaging is good, but better reach of messages to residents is necessary**
 - i) Send out mailer to post on frig with info for evacuation levels, contact phone numbers and resource information
 - ii) Give police hurricane resource information to share (e.g., card from above)
 - iii) Improve communications during outages with battery radios (e.g., consolidate stations, specify locations of information)
 - iv) Messages via the county alert and radio stations do not reference conditions in Venice very often
 - v) Better use of Hurricane Expo such as by posting videos from presentations;
 - vi) Pre-storm information on where recovery services will be available post-storm
 - vii) More advance notice of possible service interruption
 - b) **Sand Bag Availability:**
 - i) Sandbags need to be available earlier.
 - ii) Multiple sandbag locations are needed.
 - iii) Advance notice of sandbag locations and schedules
 - iv) Automation is needed to expedite the process
 - v) use county process
 - c) Clarify evacuation instructions
 - i) Difference between evacuation levels and flood zones

- ii) Evacuation levels are unnecessarily conservative (too protective)
- iii) Printed evacuation maps were small and hard to use
- iv) Make Hurricane Guides/printed materials more widely available
- v) Provide clearer instructions and resources, especially for new or seasonal residents
- d) Improve evacuation procedure
 - i) alternate evacuation routes are needed
 - ii) information about bridge openings
 - iii) designate public parking lots for car storage during the storm
 - iv) 24 hour evacuation notice for Level C was too late (no gas, traffic jams, etc.)
- e) **More evacuation shelters for the city are needed**
- f) More attention is needed for residents with special needs
 - i) **assistance for elderly to prepare (e.g., put up shutters)**
 - ii) Coordinate with nursing homes and other institutions for elderly and special needs about evacuation plans
 - iii) Targeted information is needed for tourists with no evacuation information

3) **Infrastructure & Flood Management**

- a) **Calls for improved drainage systems before the storm at Flamingo Ditch and elsewhere.**
 - i) **Clear storm drains, ditches, and culverts more frequently especially in flood-prone areas.**
- b) Requests for underground utility installation to prevent storm damage and minimize power outages.
- 4) Permit and repair process
 - a) information for procedures to rebuild could be provided before the storm

Additional concerns of those with different roles in the City (# responses):

- a. Homeowner (807) –
- b. Renters (48) –
- c. Business owner (25) -
- d. Local workers (35) – had to stay a work place during the storm
- e. Essential workers (24) – prioritize resources (e.g., sand bags, groceries) for emergency workers who are required to work

- f. Special needs (10) – neighborhood was helpful in preparing and providing walkie-talkie; had to be rescued during Helene due to sewer overflow near Flamingo Ditch; assisted living facilities need better communications about evacuations
- g. Unhoused (1) – did not know where to go without shelters on the island
- h. Tourist/visitor(7) – could not find information about evacuations
- i. Users of natural areas (112) -
- j. Students (0) -

Question 12. Describe how to improve the City service you needed most to be better prepared DURING the storms.

- 1) Limited services during the storm were expected by many - The narrative responses basically parallel the overall metrics in the survey. Most were quite complimentary of the services provided by the city. One resident indicated, for example, that during a hurricane, (s)he really doesn't expect any services from the city.
- 2) Communications and Updates
 - a) **Need to receive timely communication and updates**
 - i) Set up a city phone app for contacts and updates
 - ii) Use text/phone/radio with updates specific to Venice
 - iii) Focus on one information site as the social media is not trusted
 - b) Need information on specific storm impacts and locations, storm abatement
- 3) Infrastructure
 - a) **Keep water on where possible**
 - b) Most realize that FPL and phone companies are independent entities not reporting to the City. However, there were suggestions that the City continually address the importance of their service with the company. Restoring services is a key issue
- 4) Assistance
 - a) Medical triage areas are needed for minor injuries
 - b) Better planning for essential workers and better pay (8)
- 5) Evacuation centers are needed for Venice residents

Additional concerns of those with different roles in the City (# responses):

- a. Homeowner (807 – see above)
- b. Renters (48)
- c. Business owner (25) – provide a list of contractors/labor for help cleaning up after the storms
- d. Local workers (35)
- e. Essential workers (24)
- f. Special needs (10)
- g. Unhoused (1)
- h. Tourist/visitor(7)

- i. Users of natural areas (112)
- j. Students (0)

Question 15. How could the City help with your most important recovery challenge in Question 14?

1) Communication challenges

- a) Many respondents wanted to receive more timely and accurate updates
- b) Keep up texting/sms messages even after the storm
- c) Need info on recovery process such as when water is potable, where ice is available, resources at community center, safety at beaches/parks; recovery of power, internet and cell service
- d) special needs residents need to have means to stay in contact with medical providers
- e) City administrators, elected officials and city staff should be out in neighborhoods after the storm(s) as a show of caring and support.

2) MANY suggested improvements related to Debris Clean-up and Removal

- a) Provide timeline/schedule of locations to receive the service
- b) Pick up debris in all of Venice regardless of FEMA reimbursement
- c) Police monitor areas for private contractors dumping debris on streets instead of taking to dump
- d) Provide roll-off dumpsters for areas with severe flood damage
- e) Provide areas for homeowners to self-dump debris if possible

3) Permit and repair process

- a) Many called for a streamlined, clearly detailed, expedited permit process for minor jobs, waive fees
- b) Use a generic set of engineer drawings for minor projects like carports
- c) Provide a clearing house of vetted contractors; identify scammers
- d) The FEMA 50/50 requirement caused prolonged delays; many are still working on permits months after the storm
- e) Ensure building codes are sufficient to protect structures from hurricane force winds and flooding.
- f) With significant issues that delayed permitting, more compassion and understanding is needed from the city permitting staff as well as applicants

4) Prioritize restoration and maintenance of main stormwater ditches (Flamingo, Curry Creek, Deertown, etc.)

- a) clean storm drains and canals to prevent future flooding

5) Miscellaneous

- a) Keep onlookers off the island
- b) Clear waterways and manage pollution,
- c) Coordinate volunteers, connect volunteers with needs,
- d) Older mobile homes are a large source of debris
- e) Clear tree limbs off powerlines

- f) Provide places to recharge phones, etc.
- g) Need access to trauma therapy
- h) Thank the National Guard for water, ice, food, tarps
- i) Notify the community of places with generator power where they can go to charge phones
- 6) Questions/misconceptions?
 - a) Prevent sewage from being dumped in the Gulf?
 - b) Pick up debris from condos while waiting for FEMA approval for other areas?
 - c) Can the City of Venice work with FPL to bury power lines in areas that have above ground lines?

Additional concerns of those with different roles in the City (# responses):

- a. Homeowner (807 – see above)
- b. Renters (48)
- c. Business owner (25)
- d. Local workers (35)
- e. Essential workers (24)
- f. Special needs (10) - Restoration of disabled access to beaches ie wheelchair beach mat at Venice Beach. Boardwalk at Casperson destroyed in previous storms; power on as quickly as possible for life/health equipment; expedite permitting process
- g. Unhoused (1) - Housing. A place to live. Free laundry services. housing. Sites with drinkable water, hot meals. Portable toilets and showers.
- h. Tourist/visitor(7)
- i. Users of natural areas (112)
- j. Students (0)

Question 17. Describe how to improve the City service you needed most to be better served AFTER the storms.

1. **Remove barriers to repairs and rebuilding** - Permitting was one of the most common responses. Residents found the permitting process to be confusing and that staff lacked the ability to provide clear guidance on the steps to obtaining a permit and navigating the 50/50 Rule. Residents also felt that the City was unable to handle the volume of permits after the storm (some still trying to get a permit for repairs) and felt that some minor repairs should not warrant a permit. Residents were frustrated with being told to visit a website for information when internet and phone service was unavailable.

Resident suggestions on how the process could be improved included updating verbiage used in the letters sent to property owners, having hardcopy informational permitting packets available, additional staff after storm events, better training of staff, expedited permit reviews for minor repairs, and reduced fees or no fees from storm related permits.

Claims made with regards to individuals trying to obtain permits include that the City completely “shut down” permitting and that individuals were being asked to obtain permits for work that would not normally require a permit and questioned why the City was not following in Sarasota County’s footsteps with regards to expedited reviews and waived/reduced fees (the City did waive fees as allowable by state statute on October 24, 2024).

Informing the residents is going to be a key component during the rebuilding and recovery process after a storm event and the understanding of what work requires a permit and what work does not require a permit is regulated by the Florida Building Code, Florida Fire Prevention Code and Life Safety Code and is not up to the City.

- a. Information and communication is key.
 - i. Letters sent to residents were confusing; edit now for use in future storms
 - ii. Have hard copies of permitting requirements/process available for when internet and phones are down
 - iii. Step-by-step timeline of the permitting process
 - iv. List of documents/items required for submitting for a permit (survey, engineering plans, forms, cost estimates, etc.)
 - v. Simple explanation of 50/50 Rule
 - vi. Hold informational session at yearly Hurricane Expo
 - vii. Remove barriers for minor repairs (e.g., information requirements, fees, engineer drawings, denying change from pre-storm materials)
 - viii. Follow county process
 - b. Delays in permitting cause great frustration and harm
 - i. Have more employees in the office and field
 - ii. Help the public understand the delays months after the storms
 - iii. Have more compassion for all those involved with the permit process
2. Debris hauling was another heavily commented response. Residents felt that it took too long for debris to be picked up and that the piles of debris created dangerous conditions especially with the approach of Hurricane Milton. They also felt there was lack of communication with regards to a pickup “schedule”, meaning when and what neighborhoods were next.

Resident suggestions on how the process could be improved included setting up large container dumpsters or establishing public dump sites (in addition to the County dump) that residents could dispose of debris themselves and having the County dump open 24/7 like neighboring counties provided in days leading up to the second storm event.

Claims that were made by individuals included difficulties of picking up debris within gated communities and debris collection not occurring on private/noncity-maintained roads.

Informing the residents is going to be a key, understanding the challenges the City faced in securing and contracting a debris hauler with the mass destruction that occurred due to back-to-back storm events may ease resident frustrations.

- a. Educate residents of the process of finding, hiring, supervising debris contractors
 - b. Improve coordination with debris contractors to better inform public of “schedule”
3. Centralized recovery information
- a. Need a comprehensive storm recovery site that consolidates all necessary updates and resources
 - b. Coordinate with county on a plan for returning evacuees; a phone bank would be helpful; include communications on when it is safe to return
 - c. Brief staff on resource availability and contact information (see previous suggestion about information cards/mailings)
4. Road Conditions had a moderate number of commented responses, in which residents felt dangerous conditions arose from traffic signals being out due to loss of power, downed traffic control signs, debris being piled within the roadway and road closure information being difficult to find.

Numerous residents stated that there are still missing traffic control signs and street name signs missing from their neighborhoods.

Resident suggestions on how this situation could be improved included having a police presence at signalized intersections. Informing the residents is going to be a key. After reviewing GIS sources, it was found that the city does not have sole responsibility of any signalized intersections with the city limits. The signalized intersections fall under either the State or County jurisdiction. The County does have generators which are placed at their discretion to operate signals until power can be restored. Residents need to treat all intersections as a four-way stop until traffic controls measures can be put back into place following a storm event.

- a. Reminders to treat intersections as four-way until signals are back on or stop signs are replaced.
 - b. Remind residents to pile debris outside of the travel lanes and do not stack more than 3.5 feet per the Florida Design Manual, Chapter 212.11.6.1 Clear Sight Window Concept. Need traffic control at intersections with traffic lights that do not work
 - c. Fix street signs
 - d. Beachfront communities unsure of what to do with beach sand from surge
5. Utility services had a few responses in which residents felt that services were turned off too early, questioned why services were turned off in the first place, and the time that it took to get services turned back on. Explanations of the utilities standard operating procedures during

storm events and understanding the why services are turned off (to protect infrastructure) during storm events may alleviate resident confusion and frustration.

6. Communication after the storm (for both those who stayed and those who evacuated) was another struggle for residents. With internet, cable, and phone lines down, residents felt they had no way to get updates regarding what areas were safe to return too, what areas should be avoided, if water and sewer utilities had been turned back on, etc. Residents struggled to find or to get help to clean up their properties.

Residents found the mobile Wi-Fi towers that were setup on the island to be helpful for communicating with family members or those who evacuated.

Additional concerns of those with different roles in the City (# responses):

- a. Homeowner (807)
- b. Renters (48)
- c. Business owner (25)
- d. Local workers (35) - Should be a time period say 30-60 days to do work without a permit.
- e. Essential workers (24) - More employees. The ones you have were expected to do too much; there were not enough emergency personnel. There was nobody in my neighborhood to help people who didn't know what to do or where to go.
- f. Special needs (10)
- g. Unhoused (1)
- h. Tourist/visitor(7)
- i. Users of natural areas (112)
- j. Students (0)

Question 20. Do you have any additional comments regarding how you viewed the City's role in dealing with Hurricanes Helene and Milton?

- 1. Overall positive or very positive responses**
2. Preparedness and Resources
 - a. Long wait times for sandbags were a major concern; more distribution sites and sandbags with the sand are needed
 - b. Help for seniors preparing for the storm as well as checking on them after the storm and storm recovery
 - c. Requests for more public involvement in future plans
3. Shelter availability
 - a. Venice needs its own shelter

4. Drainage and Flood prevention
 - a. Better management of drainage is critical especially in Golden Beach area
 - b. Utilize engineering expertise of Golden Beach residents to formulate solution to flooding
5. Infrastructure and road maintenance
 - a. Concerns were expressed about post-storm condition of roads; debris, drainage, signs, traffic light outages
 - b. Faster debris removal was a primary concern
 - c. Underground utilities would help prevent so many outages; trimming trees away from lines is critical
 - d. Repairing and opening beaches, jetty, and pier are high priorities
6. Development
 - a. Too much development has overwhelmed city services and infrastructure; evacuations are hindered by too many people using the same route
7. Communication
 - a. Alerts cover Sarasota not Venice
 - b. Focus on media outlets that do not require power or internet; battery radios and texts are good outlets
8. Permitting
 - a. Slow process has caused unnecessary harm, especially for minor repairs
 - b. Use of assessed valuation rather than market value a problem
9. Use volunteers more effectively
 - a. Venice-Nokomis Rotary noted for providing volunteers to care for critical needs
 - b. Respondent 196 has many useful suggestions for more effective and efficient use of volunteers based on experiences in 2024 storms
 - i. Pre-hurricane season planning for needs and coordination
 - ii. Provide "compassion care"
 - iii. Tool bank
 - c. Respondent 732 is a retired county EOC, FDOT evacuation expert who volunteered to help improve evacuations.

Additional concerns of those with different roles in the City:

- a. Homeowner (807)
- b. Renters (48) - Set up at community center with ice was fantastic!
- c. Business owner (25) - Consult with FEMA and the insurance agencies. There are a lot of things the city can do to avoid a repeat of the recent flood events, which government and insurance

agencies would gladly support because it saves them money in the long run (in addition to lessening pain and suffering); there needs to be help or assistance to help small businesses

- d. Local workers (35) – see response 196 for details to improve volunteer use and efficiency
- e. Essential workers (24) - You need more people to go. Check-up and down every street to make sure everyone is okay. And find out what kind of help everybody needs. This was sorely missing
- f. Special needs (10) - Very disappointing, requirements kept changing, causing additional delays to returning to our home
- g. Unhoused (1) - Show more COMPASSION.
- h. Tourist/visitor(7)
- i. Users of natural areas (112)
- j. Students (0)

