

MEMORANDUM

TO: Citizen Advisory Board

FROM: Mary Davis, Project Lead

RE: City of Venice 2024 Hurricane Survey Summaries and Hurricane After Action Review Recommendations

DATE: April 16, 2025

We have finished the 2024 Hurricane Survey for the City of Venice. The 880 responses have been summarized in two parts. Responses to the multiple-choice questions (Part 1) were presented at the March 19 CAB meeting. Thank you to everyone who summarized the responses to the five open-ended questions. Each question was reviewed by at least two board members. Your summaries have been compiled into a final summary (Part 2, with the exception of incorporating the summary of responses to Question 20 by one board member). These results are still draft. Any errors, omissions, or additions that you identify can still be changed before the documents are finalized. These summaries are ready to inform the last task for this project: identification of what the City did right during the 2024 hurricane season and recommendations of how to improve for future storms.

At our March 19 meeting we decided to begin to develop our recommendations at the April 16 meeting and have James Clinch, Assistant City Manager, answer questions at our May meeting about our recommendations in light of the City's Hurricane After Action Review. For this process to be effective, we should have a draft set of recommendations ready for Mr. Clinch in May. I suggest that we plan on addressing the following at our April meeting as parameters for developing the recommendations:

1. Additional sources of information – Each of us was asked to help ensure that our recommendations be as representative of City residents, workers, and visitors as possible. Did the survey address concerns of these different roles? Is there information to incorporate into our recommendations in addition to the survey results?
2. Perceptions – Some recommendations that came out of the survey are based on incomplete knowledge of what the city does or a different perspective about what occurred. Should the CAB recommendations include these concerns and issues?

3. Wingspan – Many issues raised in the survey are about services and jurisdictions beyond the City’s direct control. Should the CAB recommendations ask for City involvement on behalf of residents with other governmental entities, businesses, and organizations?
4. Format – Our recommendations need to be presented in an informative and compelling manner. How should the list of recommendations be organized? Should only priority recommendations be listed? Will the list of recommendations be sufficient or is a report similar to the City HAAR be necessary? (I have attached my personal draft of recommendations to this memo to serve as a strawman for how to format our recommendations.)
5. Next steps – What do we need to do to finish this project?

Hurricane After Action Review

Draft Recommendations

By Mary Davis, CAB Vice Chair and Project Lead

April 16, 2025

1. **Communications** – Messaging from the City about storm preparations, evacuations, status of the storms and conditions in Venice were good, but often did not reach the residents. People who were able to access social media and the City website were impressed with how complete the information was. However, those without power, phones, or internet had trouble finding necessary information. Information from the most used outlets (i.e., county text alert, television, and weather apps) was not specific to Venice, sensationalized rather than as public service announcements, and/or not very helpful in determining when people could

return after the storms. In addition, the City Hurricane Expo was not used by many people.

- a. Early in the hurricane season, mail out to all residents information cards to post in their homes with city service contact information and media outlets where storm updates will be broadcast. The media outlets (e.g., local radio stations) need to be available during power, internet, or phone service outages.
 - b. Provide police and emergency staff with information cards to give out on request when meeting residents who still need information.
 - c. Broaden communication during outages through the use of battery radios (e.g., consolidate stations, specify locations of information)
 - d. Collaborate with local radio stations to provide public service announcements on the storm status.
 - e. Include a page in the Hurricane Guide explaining how to get information before, during and after the storms when power, phone, and internet services are not available.
 - f. Keep communications going during the recovery period. Need info on recovery process such as when water is potable, where ice is available, resources at community center, safety at beaches/parks; schedule priorities for debris removal
2. **Sandbag distribution** – Many residents were not able to get sandbags in a timely fashion. The bags were distributed at a different location from where they were filled with sand. Bags were filled by hand. The sand station was closed the weekend prior to Milton. Sand was available at only one location, so long lines of cars formed that often took hours to reach the fill station. Volunteers could have been used more effectively to cover when city staff was not available. The whole process was late in starting up before the storms, only available during work hours, and too slow to meet the demand.
- a. Have filled sandbags available earlier in the season
 - b. Have sandbags and sand available at the same site
 - c. Either open more than one site or purchase a sand bag filling machine.
 - d. Organize volunteers early in the hurricane season
 - e. Consult with Sarasota County for how to learn from their process to make ours more efficient
3. **Evacuation** – Mandatory evacuation notices were issued during Hurricanes Helene and Milton. While most people seemed to be able to evacuate in a timely manner

and not have undo problems, many residents did not evacuate. Many felt safe in their homes and did not want to go to the trouble or cost of evacuating. People who were not able to access online maps to find their evacuation level were frustrated with the poor quality of small printed maps (e.g., in the newspaper and Hurricane Guide). There is confusion about the difference between floodplain zones and evacuation levels. As evacuation orders for Level C were issued later for Hurricane Milton, evacuation for some residents was complicated by already crowded highways, lack of hotel rooms, and shortages of gasoline. Some residents said that they would not evacuate again. This poses a problem for the City as emergency personnel may be put at risk with avoidable rescues during storms had evacuation notices been followed.

- a. Make larger, clearer, printed evacuation level maps available.
 - b. Identify elevated parking areas where residents can leave cars.
 - c. Communicate the availability of evacuation centers including whether they take pets and can handle people with special needs.
 - d. If evacuation centers were full for Hurricanes Helene and/or Milton, collaborate with Sarasota County to establish a center in Venice.
 - e. Work with Sarasota County and the Florida Department of Transportation to identify ways to reduce congestion on evacuation routes.
4. **Debris removal** – Tremendous amounts of debris was generated during Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Ruined furniture, appliances, building materials, and other household items were stacked with large piles of yard debris along curbs throughout the city. It was unsafe and unsightly. It turned out to be flying projectiles with Hurricane Milton less than two weeks following Hurricane Helene. Residents felt that it should have been collected more quickly. They did not understand the priorities of the contractors in which areas and when the debris would be removed. Residents asked for ways to remove the waste themselves.
- a. Communicate the priorities and scheduling of the debris removal contractors throughout the debris removal process.
 - b. Investigate the availability of dumpsters to be provided around the city for residents to deposit their debris.
 - c. Open landfills so residents can haul their own household and yard debris.
5. **Drainage** – Several areas in the City had damaging floods during the storms. Areas along Curry Creek, Hatchet Creek, creeks on the island and other low-lying areas flooded from rainfall that could not drain readily. Drainage was slowed by blocked channels and high water levels in receiving waters. Coastal areas flooded from a

combination of rainfall, high tide, and storm surge. Damage from coastal flooding was compounded by the storm surge carrying sand into homes along the beach strand. Golden Beach, a naturally low-lying area, was hard hit in particular by flooding from the storm surge when Flamingo Ditch could not drain to the Gulf. Residents in flooded areas experienced damage ranging from loss of landscaping to having to demolish and rebuild their homes.

- a. Conduct studies on watersheds that experienced flood damage to structures to identify areas that need better drainage then implement drainage improvement measures.
- b. Expedite the Flamingo Ditch study to identify and implement flood management measures as soon as possible.
- c. Prioritize maintaining clear drainages in the Flamingo Ditch watershed and elsewhere before storms hit to minimize the need to clear drainages immediately after the storms.

6. **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 a 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
7. **Meeting special needs** – Senior and disabled residents need assistance preparing their homes for the storms, evacuating, and recovering from the storms. They are limited in doing heavy physical activity preparing their homes, bearing the costs of stocking up food and other supplies for the storms, keeping medical equipment functional during outages, and staying in contact with their medical providers. Many residents are not able access texts or online resources for information about the storms. Residents of assisted living facilities, with those in memory care in particular, often do not understand what is expected of them during the storms.
- a. Mail out information (see Recommendation 1.a above)
 - b. Ensure that special needs residents are on the city registry for police and emergency services.
 - c. Help HOA's, churches, and volunteer organizations identify residents with special needs and check on their needs before, during, and after the storms.
8. **Volunteers** – Many important tasks were performed by volunteers before, during and after the storms. Volunteers filled sandbags, helped residents with special needs, cleaned up yards and parks, cleared out flood-damaged homes, hauled

debris to piles for pick up and provided other physical and compassion services. And there are many other services (e.g., phone banks, information desk, etc.) that volunteers could provide to the City to reduce the load on over-extended city employees. Residents have expertise that would be valuable in organizing the many residents who already volunteer or are prepared to volunteer. A large pool of volunteers is available to help.

- a. Hire a volunteer coordinator.
- b. Facilitate the formation of a hurricane volunteer committee that would plan and organize help before, during, and after the storms.
- c. Develop a hurricane volunteer action plan.
- d. Provide a central location for hurricane volunteers to use as a base of operations and where residents can come to find volunteer opportunities.

9. **Centralized Hurricane Resource Location** – Residents often referred in the survey to not knowing where to go for hurricane information and other resources. Before the storms, for example, clear printed maps of evacuation levels were needed by residents who could not access online maps. Residents with special needs need help with heavy, physical tasks to prepare for the storms. They may also need to be placed on a registry for police to check on them after the storm. After the storm abates and services are still out, residents need to charge phones and access internet connections. Florida, Power and Light and the phone and internet providers need to answer questions about outages. Residents do not know where to go to volunteer. There were many questions about the debris removal process. And residents just need to get together over a cup of coffee and a donut to commiserate and support each other.

- a. Dedicate space in the Venice Community Center to act as a place where residents know where to go for hurricane related resources before, during and after storms and that can serve as a deployment site for the various services described above as appropriate.
- b. Work with the Hurricane Volunteer Committee before the storm to provide staffing for information services.