

# Making Space for Climate Resilience

A Capacity Assessment for the Town of Mansfield, MA



Prepared by Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center and  
The SNEP Network

[www.snepnetwork.org](http://www.snepnetwork.org)  
[efc.syr.edu](http://efc.syr.edu)

## Background

The Southeast New England (SNEP) Network is comprised of over 16 different partner organizations from across the region and tasked with helping communities address complex water resources management challenges. The SNEP Network is administered through EPA's partnership with the New England Environmental Finance Center, a non-profit technical assistance provider for EPA Region 1, located at the University of Southern Maine. In July 2021, the Town of Mansfield requested assistance from the SNEP Network for an organizational capacity assessment related to climate resiliency planning. The request documented the Town's growing number of efforts to enhance climate resiliency, including completion of the Massachusetts Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) planning workshop, participation in Canoe River Aquifer steering committee, and ongoing open space and recreation planning. The MVP program, operated by the State of Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, provides support for cities and towns in Massachusetts to begin the process of planning for climate change resiliency and implementing priority projects<sup>1</sup>. Communities that take part in this program are later eligible for competitive action grant funding opportunities.

At the same time, Mansfield's status as a commuter hub between Boston and Providence increases the development pressure and reinforces the need to protect the Town's critical built and natural resources. In October 2021, Network Partners from the Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center, Kim Groff Consulting, and New England Environmental Finance Center met with the Town of Mansfield to launch the project, agree on a scope of work, and review the final [memorandum of agreement](#).

## Assessment Overview: Mansfield's Climate Change Planning Efforts

---

*Capacity Assessment Goal: through a limited-scope capacity assessment, identify processes and actions that will serve as a roadmap for the Town's next steps in climate resilience and lead to improved stormwater management and enhanced climate resilience.*

---

Planning for resiliency begins with a clear vision for the future and a shared understanding of local risks and opportunities. However, many communities, including Mansfield, are tackling resiliency efforts across different departments and on slightly different timelines, and have multiple planning instruments in place that bear on these issues. In these cases, completing a capacity assessment or other strategic planning exercise can support shared reflection between Town staff using a common language.

When it comes to planning for resiliency, Mansfield's capacity to prepare for and pay for dynamic and frequently changing risks is important to consider. Although the Town does not have a specific climate adaptation plan or a resiliency plan adopted with a clear articulation of climate-related threats, the Town has completed the MVP planning process, which engaged stakeholders, town staff, and regional actors in a shared exercise for understanding climate impacts and identifying

priority projects. The MVP process also opens the door to additional funding for Action Grants, which the Town actively pursues.

In addition to the MVP planning process results, the Town has three other major planning documents that outline the Town’s major strategies and initiatives that relate to climate change resilience. The 2020 Master Plan provides an aspirational community vision governed by six “pillars”, including strong infrastructure and accessible green spaces. Mansfield’s Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) was updated in 2016 and provides a blueprint for how the town will maintain and enhance open spaces and continue to build recreation opportunities for residents—as a commuter hub, open space planning is essential for balancing development and new construction needs. The OSRP opens the door for additional project funding from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation. Lastly, the Town’s Stormwater Management Plan outlines a 5-year program for managing stormwater, and the necessary pollution prevention controls needed to ensure clean and safe waterways. The Stormwater Management Plan has completed year 1, year 2, and year 3 minimum control measures and is currently in its 4<sup>th</sup> year of operation. The Town also manages a robust capital improvement program, which the Town Manager submits on a yearly basis to the Capital Improvement Committee for approval. This process takes into account the many priorities listed in the above plans and others.

At the time of this analysis, the Town does not have a Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) recognized by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The Town’s former HMP expired in 2014. In March 2022, the Town of Mansfield submitted a letter of intent to the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) to apply for hazard mitigation planning funds, however this attempt was unsuccessful. The Town is prepared to pursue other sources of planning funds for hazard mitigation. These include the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) for a [District Local Technical Assistance](#) (DLTA) grant. If awarded, the Town will partner with regional planning agencies (RPAs) to elevate their existing MVP priorities and develop comprehensive mitigation strategies based on a full assessment of risks.

**Table 1: Climate Resilience Planning Apparatus**

*Mansfield’s Adopted Plans*

*Not Current or Not Available:*



2020 Master Plan

Hazard Mitigation Plan

2016 Open Space and Recreation Plan

Climate Adaptation Plan/ Resilience Plan

Mansfield MVP Report

Mansfield Stormwater Management Plan

## Inventory of Mansfield’s Resilience Initiatives and Analysis

Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center (SU-EFC) completed an inventory of stormwater and resilience planning activities along with an analysis of each initiative and the challenges, responsibilities, and progress made in terms of climate resiliency. The inventory was built using key planning documents (listed in Table 1 above), selected for the analysis based on their 1.) relevance to climate change planning and 2.) relevancy to statewide funding mechanisms for proactive climate change planning, stormwater improvements, and infrastructure improvements. SU-EFC first reviewed the key documents and broke down each planning document by their major stated initiatives. Here, we view an initiative as a building block of the planning document that describes a desired end state, and that enumerates specific actions and strategies.

---

*Initiative: a building block of the planning document that describes a desired end state, and that enumerates specific actions and strategies.*

---

To ground our analysis, we considered key guiding questions like: what actions and strategies on this list pose a major challenge? What actions and strategies on this list represent a high priority for climate preparedness? We also discussed important contextual factors, such as how the actions and strategies were managed across departments, and the extent to which progress occurred for each action based on the key staff person’s expectations. Several of these guiding questions were informed by organizational capacity assessment tools often used in the philanthropy and corporate sectors to facilitate conversation and discussion of an organization’s direction and abilities<sup>ii</sup>.

Our analysis identified 38 unique initiatives that together enumerate 145 strategies and actions. In the sections below, we will summarize our key findings and initial recommendations. Our findings are also available on an [interactive dashboard](#) with our data inputs and live inventory. It is important to note that although we were able to inventory 145 total actions and strategies, some (~9) were not able to be fully assessed due to a lack of information—these are comprised mainly of planning actions on the MVP.

To complete our analysis, we completed informal interviews with the Conservation Department (Katelyn Gonyer), the Public Works Department (Josh Reinke and Katelyn Gonyer), and Tighe and Bond (Natalie Konicki). Katelyn Gonyer also engaged the Planning Department (Shaun Bourke) in the process separately.

## Mansfield Dashboard

### Plans Analyzed

2016 Open Space Plan  
 Stormwater Management Plan  
 MVP Report  
 Master Plan

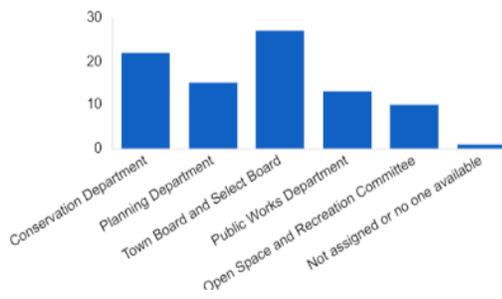
Total Actions + Strategies Identified

145

### Resiliency Loads: Description

In our assessment, we identified which departments were responsible for completing or overseeing the initiative. Most of the time, responsibility is shared between multiple departments. This is also does not account for the fact that some initiatives may require more time, money and effort than others. We were not able to identify this information for every initiative.

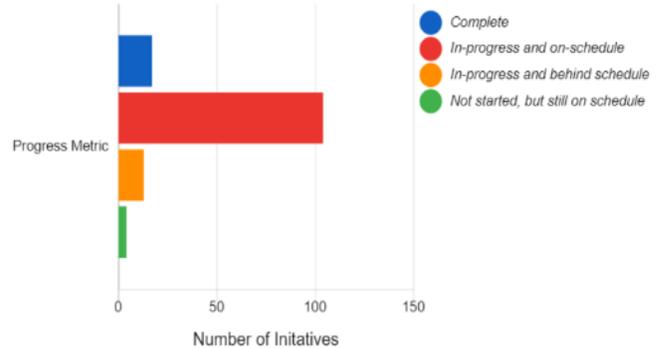
### Resiliency Initiative "Loads"



## Our Resiliency Capacity Assessment

We assessed Mansfield's four major planning documents that define strategies for ongoing resilience and preparedness to climate change. We completed informal interviews with the Conservation Department (Katelyn Gonyer), the Public Works Department, and Tighe and Bond. Katelyn Gonyer also engaged the Planning Department in the process separately. 91% of Mansfield's initiatives are on track, and only 9% are behind schedule.

### Status of Current Resiliency Initiatives



### "Red Flag" Challenges

Primary	Actions and Strategies within the initiative	High Priority, Medium Priority, or Low Priority	Plan
<b>Total</b>			
1e	Conduct ongoing reviews	Low Priority	2016 Open Space Plan
7a	Continue local workshop	High Priority	MVP
7c	Highlight importance of k	High Priority	MVP

## Key Findings

- 91% (or 125) of Mansfield's actions and strategies across the four planning documents are complete or on-schedule. Only 9% are behind schedule.
- There are 3 high-priority actions that were identified as potential "red flag" challenges and pose difficulty to responsible departments, which may stress the Town's capacity in the future. All 3 are rooted in the MVP planning process and listed as:
  - MVP Plan: Highlight importance of keeping local water local for better water quality and increased quantity
  - MVP Plan: Draw attention to the connection between the Three Mile River and the Taunton River through public education, special focus on middle school aged students
  - MVP Plan: Create a more consistent methodology for monitoring and maintaining critical infrastructure

Two of the above actions are *outreach-oriented*— the capacity to conduct ongoing outreach is a challenge for most municipalities, including Mansfield. We elaborate on some short-term recommendations for outreach in the following section.

- In our assessment, we identified which departments were responsible for completing or overseeing each action. Most of the time, responsibility is shared between multiple departments. This also does not account for the fact that some initiatives may require more time, resources, and effort than others. We were not able to identify this information for every action.
  - The Town Select Board has diverse responsibilities across 27 actions
  - The Planning Department has responsibilities across 15 actions, mostly for development activities
  - The Conservation Department has responsibilities across 22 actions and participates in activities **across every plan**
  - The Public Works Department has responsibilities across 13 actions, many of which are high-priority stormwater activities that may represent significant operations and maintenance investments.
  - The Open Space and Recreation Committee has responsibilities across 10 actions, mainly related to the OSRP.
- Outreach-oriented tasks make up a significant component of behind-schedule tasks, including outreach related to developing signage and way-finding on trails, hosting on-site events, and drawing attention to watershed connections between Mansfield’s critical waterways. Based on discussions with the Town Manager and staff, there is additional outreach expertise in the Town that may be leveraged to support boost messaging related watershed connections and climate change.
- The Conservation Department performs many of the environmental outreach activities across plans; and of the 13 actions that are behind schedule, the Conservation Department shares responsibility in managing about 10 of them. The Conservation Department is also the smallest Department that has responsibilities for climate resilience activities.
- Low-priority actions that are behind schedule may pose a greater stress on capacity, as they may be important to operations but not integral to the process of preparing for climate related risks. Low-priority tasks may be akin to administrative burdens. We identified several low-priority tasks as behind schedule:
  - OSRP: Conduct ongoing reviews of existing open space parcels, including trail conditions, parking and equipment safety.
  - OSRP: Use GIS mapping to create accurate trail maps for existing trail systems that are easily available to the public as a hard copy and electronically on the Town’s website (this task is mostly complete, but additional funds and resources are needed to move the maps to a printed or online format.
- Although there are two tasks that are behind schedule for Mansfield’s Stormwater Management Plan (such as cleaning catchment basins), they are going to be completed shortly and the delay was due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Recommendations

**Develop and refine community planning to address the diverse nature of resilience, thereby encompassing environmental, social, and economic issues.** Undergoing this process with a range of

staff, committee members, and stakeholder participants will elevate important climate-related challenges and their social, economic, and environmental impacts. While there are a multitude of ways to do this type of planning, it is advantageous to secure planning funds—especially through programs that offer regular implementation funding opportunities. Potential funding sources include solicitations from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as well as grants from the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) for [a District Local Technical Assistance \(DLTA\)](#) projects. As of August, 2022, the Mansfield Department of Planning has a pending grant application to pursue Hazard Mitigation Planning through the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA). FEMA offers competitive funding for Hazard Mitigation Planning on an annual basis. SRPEDD’s DLTA projects align with current best practices to include more in-depth analysis, have a high likelihood of creating more public and private investment, and have matching resources that enable work to span multiple years, with the goal to create positive outcomes for communities. The Town’s resiliency planning efforts should take into account some of the “red flag” challenges identified in this analysis, including those related to public outreach and regional efforts for watershed protection. The new plan should consider the future regional efforts related to the protection of the Canoe River Aquifer and the needs identified by the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District.

**Engage inter-departmental outreach expertise, other technical assistance services, or volunteer board members to develop key messages, share success stories, and bolster stakeholder engagement around climate resiliency planning.** Outreach is one of the main types of tasks that stress current capacity at the Town, but the good news is that a short-term “push” can have long-term benefits. The Town should take advantage of inter-departmental expertise and social media channels, particularly the “Discover Mansfield” initiative led by Mansfield’s Economic Development team, to communicate messages about the Town’s ever-growing focus on climate resiliency and the benefits of proactive planning. The Town should make use of its significant Facebook following (7k followers) as well as other social accounts to share success stories, key messages such as cost-effectiveness of proactive planning, and generate enthusiasm for future financing and investment in resiliency strategies. The “Discover Mansfield” initiative

Sharing successes (such as upcoming advancements in stewarding the Canoe River Aquifer) through social campaigns will have multiple benefits for the Town, drawing attention to unique resources as well as supporting ongoing goals in the Conservation Department.

**Create a dedicated park maintenance staff position.** The findings of this analysis confirm that Mansfield’s land management needs are expanding and will benefit from increased maintenance activities. This need is echoed in the 2020 Master Plan, under Goal 2C (Preserve Mansfield’s natural resources, wildlife habitats and remaining agricultural lands), Strategy IV, which aspires to “establish a robust maintenance and land management plan for Mansfield’s conservation sites overseen by a dedicated conservation and parks maintenance staff position”<sup>iii</sup>. As a next step, the Conservation Planner should work with parks staff, the Finance Committee, and other at the Town to create a draft list of position requirements and tasks.

**In the next 5 years, the Town should integrate resiliency projects into the Town’s already robust CIP process.** As the Town continues to develop a portfolio of climate-resilient initiatives and

successfully communicates the benefits of proactive planning to residents, a strategic approach will be needed to ensure that dedicated financial resources are available to make resilient infrastructure investments. Although this analysis did not assess budget streams associated with different initiatives (this information was not easily available), the Town has a clear track record of good financial management and a healthy Capital Improvement Program. The Town officials meet twice annually to review priorities. Additionally, the Town's stormwater programs are typically included in the 5-year plan, setting a strong precedent for including more resilience and climate-focused projects. As a first step, the Conservation Planner should provide phased projects, based on needs identified in the MVP plan, Open Space Plan, and others, to the Finance Committee and Town Manager and participate in CIP meetings.

**Prepare to expand the Conservation Department within in the next 5 years.** Within the next 3 years, the Town should re-assess the needs of the Conservation Department and determine whether additional outreach skillsets are needed to expand the Department's capacity. While existing staff in the Conservation Department can do outreach tasks, other tasks often take priority. It may be practical to hire additional support staff with expertise in developing signage, website maintenance, and environmental interpretation or education.

## Looking Ahead: Mainstreaming Resiliency Planning

The key findings and recommendations from this report were reviewed by the Mansfield Select Board and discussed during the September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022 [Select Board Meeting](#). Katelyn Gonyer, Conservation Planner and Tess Clark, Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center presented the key aspects of the process and recommendations. Katelyn Gonyer has reported that the Town has moved forward in integrating the Conservation Department across several committees related to capital improvement and finance, and engaged in further conversation and discussion of coordinated outreach efforts. The Town is also considering funding opportunities for hazard mitigation planning and investigating opportunities for expanding the Conservation Department.

In reflecting on the capacity assessment process, Mansfield staff commented that the process itself provided valuable opportunities to discuss resiliency in an organized way without introducing a high-level of burden for information gathering. As a result, Town staff were able to make small changes that help mainstream resiliency efforts, including increasing the communication between the Conservation Department and other committees. Some other benefits of the capacity assessment process include:

- The process demonstrates the breadth of work that the Town is already doing and reinforces the need to communicate.
- The process generates excitement, dialogue, and confidence in pursuing resiliency planning within the municipality, and offers an opportunity to show the community a strong commitment to resiliency planning.
- The process distilled a large amount of information, beyond what is typically doable for day-to-day operations, and made it digestible for short-term decision-making

*Acknowledgements: This report was prepared by Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center in partnership with the Southeast New England (SNEP) Network and the Town of Mansfield Conservation Department. This project would not have been possible without the efforts of: Katelyn Gonyer, Town of Mansfield; Kim Groff, Community Liaison, SNEP Network; Jes Eckerlin, Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center, and Tess Clark, Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center.*



*The SNEP Network is administered through EPA's partnership with the [New England Environmental Finance Center](#), a non-profit technical assistance provider for EPA Region 1, located at the University of Southern Maine, part of the University of Maine System.*

*This product has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency under Assistance Agreement SE- 00A00655-0 to the recipient. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, nor does the U.S. EPA endorse trade names or recommend the use of any products, services or enterprises mentioned in this document.*

<sup>i</sup> "MA Climate Change Clearinghouse." 2022. Mass.gov. 2022. <https://resilientma.mass.gov/mvp/>.

<sup>ii</sup> Informing Change. (2017, October). A guide to organizational capacity assessment tools. Retrieved March 2022, from <https://informingchange.com/organizational-capacityassessment-tools/>

<sup>iii</sup> Review of Mansfield Master Plan Update 2020. 2020. Mansfield Department of Planning. Accessed June 12, 2022. <https://www.mansfieldma.com/DocumentCenter/View/2408/2020-Master-Plan-FINAL>.