

## **CHAPTER FIVE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE**

### **COMMUNITY RESILIENCE**

Community Resilience could be defined as the ability to prepare for hazards, adapting to changing conditions, while withstanding and recovering rapidly for disruptions. In order to become a resilient community, leaders must put an importance on disaster preparedness such as prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery.

### **DISASTER RECOVERY AND RESPONSE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The First Tennessee Development District developed a Disaster Recovery and Response Management Plan in 2013 that provide local elected officials with a guide to resources available in the event of a natural disaster causing significant impact to the Region. The purpose and focus of the Plan is to identify the local response and local resources available for short and long-term recovery. The main focus of the Recovery and Response Plan is to address needs from one week following the disaster up to one year. While our region responds well to immediate disasters, there was a need to develop a document to guide elected officials after the initial response period.

### **NATURAL DISASTERS**

Natural Disasters seem to be hitting communities with more frequency throughout the United States. Many emergencies are not large enough to warrant Federal or State assistance. As storms grow larger and the damage more severe, the federal government can provide financial assistance to local and state governments to assist with recovery efforts. FEMA's mission is to support citizens and first responders to ensure that nationally the country can sustain and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from and mitigate all hazards.

The Governor of Tennessee by executive authority can authorize the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) to help protect the public from natural disasters and emergencies. TEMA provides assistance by reaching out for mutual aid from the state, other states, local jurisdictions and FEMA for resources. Other activities include managing the flow of material and teams to the on-site commander.

The counties that make up the First Tennessee Development District have Local Emergency Planning Committees to address emergencies as they arise. The following are the Local Emergency Planning Committee Chairpersons for each County:

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Gary Smith  
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Greeneville-Greene County  
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Two responses to natural disasters are listed below and help evaluate the region's ability to respond.

### *GREENE COUNTY*

The Camp Creek and Horse Creek areas of Greene County were changed forever on a stormy night in 2011. Nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains these two small communities were hit by two E3 Super Tornadoes on April 27, 2011. The storms came from the south, where it had devastated parts of Alabama earlier in the day. When it was over, at least 120 tornadoes, 15 of which were classified as violent, had struck the south. Due to the tornadoes strength, both jumped the mountains, which normally act as a barrier for these types of storms. Eight (8) people lost their lives and hundreds of structures were either destroyed or lost. It was only the second major tornado to hit Greene County in 50 years.

Greene County's response was swift, beginning with responders opening a shelter that very night. Over 600 residents utilized the make shift facility once the tornadoes had passed. The next day the community, responders and TEMA came together to provide residents with essentials such as food and water. Over the next coming weeks and months, Greene County and non-profits teamed together and began working with residents to assist with home repairs and reconstruction of homes in the two communities.

### *WASHINGTON COUNTY*

In 2012, floodwaters swept through the Dry Creek section of Washington County, TN. The flood wiped out homes and displaced families. As the water rose to extraordinary levels, homes were knocked off their foundations and began to float down the street.

Based on Washington County's New Build project, which proposed to construct 40 homes in the Dry Creek area, Tennessee Housing Development Agency (THDA) launched a new statewide grant program to help disaster communities throughout the State of Tennessee. THDA was impressed with the public-private partnerships in which \$300,000 in THDA grants were leveraged into \$3 million in assistance for flood victims. Washington County combined THDA funds with the Federal Home Loan Bank of Cincinnati and private donations gathered by the non-profit ASP along with the First Tennessee Development District (FTDD) to replace the devastated homes. The program was established to help those communities that experience a disaster, but do not qualify for FEMA relief efforts.

### **ECONOMIC RESILIENCE**

Communities can experience economic loss as well. Although these shocks manifest themselves in different ways, the losses can just be as devastating. Job losses and economic malaise can negatively affect not only families, but also the community as a whole.

Economic resilience is a community's ability to recover from a loss, withstanding the major disruption, or avoid job losses all together. Though the latter is the goal, it is not realistic in today's economy. The pressure on communities can come from downturns or events nationally or internationally, changes in a particular industry cluster or external shocks, such as closures of military bases or natural disasters. Economic Development organizations are instrumental in building economic resilience through information dissemination and responding to external inquiries. Local leaders play a major role in working with displaced families to help secure new employment.

A fairly recent event shows the region's response to an economic business closing.

### *UNICOI COUNTY*

Business decisions can negatively impact a community, especially those communities approaching distressed status. Over the last two years, Unicoi County, TN has been

dealing with an announcement by CSX to close the rail yard in Erwin, TN. The rail yard was a major employer for the County and was a significant influence on the area. With the announcement, 300 Tennesseans' lost their jobs. Once the dust had settled, the county leaders, economic development professionals, along with the Town of Erwin began working with the State of Tennessee's Economic and Community Development (ECD) to begin the process of addressing the loss of jobs. Many of the employees were lacking the necessary skills to find gainful employment in the region. The Alliance for Business and Training (AB&T), along with assistance from the State, established programs to increase skill sets for today's job market. In addition to the work by AB&T, a Power Grant was applied for and awarded from Economic Development Administration (EDA) and Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to assist with tourism activities and new equipment for the Mountain Harvest Kitchen in the Town of Unicoi. The Mountain Harvest Kitchen is a kitchen incubator funded by ARC and EDA grants to assist small entrepreneurs reach their goals. The over 3,500 sq. ft. facility includes state-of-the-art equipment that will allow business owners the ability to produce food products for resale. This facility along with the retraining of employees by the State of Tennessee and AB&T, is an example of how to address economic losses in a community.

**Strategic Finding 11. Response to Natural Disasters & Economic Adjustments.**

The region has traditionally responded very well unexpected events including natural disasters and economic adjustments with excellent emergency management services and community response to help families and businesses in need. An area that needs improvement is the response from one week to one year. Coordination by local governments with the affected communities and the myriad of public agencies involved in the process can be very complex and time consuming. As learned from the CSX closure in Erwin, the State, Regional and local resources for labor and workforce development responded well to the needs of displaced workers.

An area that the region can improve is in making its infrastructure more disaster resistant. For example, water and wastewater treatment facilities can be designed to better accommodate a flood or drought period. Water distribution lines can be designed with redundancy and to loop in the event water is disrupted from one direction. The same redundancy principle applies to telecommunications and electricity.