

# 1.- Introduction

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## Introduction

Flood hazards occur in almost every community, but with careful planning and deliberate action, such events can be prevented from turning into devastating disasters. With the frequency and severity of flooding projected to increase in the planning area, **it is imperative that Buchanan County work toward building a more resilient community that aims to reduce the impact of flooding on people and places.**

A resilient future is built on a foundation of equity and an understanding of a community's unique needs, connecting the ways we respond to disasters through community-wide investments to improve the outcomes for all residents.

Flood events threaten the life and safety of residents and have the potential to damage or destroy both public and private property, disrupt the local economy, and impact the overall quality of life of individuals who live, work, and recreate in Buchanan County. While the threat from flooding may never be fully eliminated, the goal and conscientious practice of reducing risks to people and property is a proven worthwhile effort. This practice, combined with efforts to collectively strengthen the community against shocks and stressors, is referred to as **resilience planning.**

Local resilience planning involves the process of organizing community resources, identifying critical resources and capabilities, assessing needs and vulnerabilities, and determining how to best manage, expand, or strengthen critical resources to reduce risk. This process culminates in a resilience plan that recognizes the ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from significant hazards and threats with minimum damage to social well-being, health, the economy, and the environment. The resilience plan will identify specific activities designed to achieve risk reduction in both the near- and long-term.

Communities that participate in resilience planning have the potential to enjoy many benefits, including:

- Equitably improving community resilience by prioritizing the most vulnerable populations;
- Preventing loss of life and property;
- Avoiding disaster related costs;
- Recovering quickly from disasters and rebounding;
- Reducing future vulnerability through better development practices;
- Expediting the receipt of pre-disaster and post-disaster grant funding; and
- Becoming eligible for project funding through the State's Community Flood Preparedness Fund (CFPF)

Typically, communities that participate in resilience planning are described as having the potential to produce long-term and recurring benefits by breaking the repetitive cycle of disaster loss. A core assumption of resilience planning is that the investments made before a hazard event will significantly reduce the demand for post-disaster assistance by lessening the need for emergency response, repair, recovery, and reconstruction. Furthermore, resilience practices will enable residents, businesses, and industries to re-establish themselves in the wake of a disaster. **This plan aims serve as a resilience plan for Buchanan County, specifically in regard to flood resilience and flood risk reduction.**

# Buchanan County Resilience Planning Background

Buchanan County's long history with destructive floods includes impacts to its community landmarks, homes, businesses, and the coal mines that have long been the economic backbone of the County. However, the County has rarely possessed the resources to properly address flooding impacts and plan new approaches for the future. In 2022, Buchanan County received a grant from the inaugural round of Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR's) Community Flood Preparedness Fund (CFPF) to build capacity and develop an actionable resilience plan. The County worked with First Earth|2030, Resource Environmental Solutions (RES), and Stantec to undertake a process to build capacity and develop an actionable resilience plan.

## Plan Scope and Requirements

The Buchanan County Flood Resilience Plan was developed with funds and support from the CFPF. The CFPF was established in the Code of Virginia pursuant to Chapter 13, Title 10.1, Article 4, Section 10.1-603.24 and Section 10.1-603-25 and the provisions of § 10.1-1330. Clean Energy and Community Flood Preparedness Fund, which was passed during the 2020 session of the General Assembly. Money in the fund comes from the auction of carbon allowances through the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI).

The fund was established to provide support for regions and localities across Virginia to reduce the impacts of flooding, including flooding driven by climate change. The fund will prioritize projects that are in concert with local, state and federal floodplain management standards, local resilience plans and the Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan. The fund empowers communities to complete vulnerability assessments and develop and implement action-oriented approaches to bolster flood preparedness and resilience.<sup>1</sup>

The following conditions shall apply to the use of moneys allocated from the fund:

1. Localities shall use moneys in the fund primarily for the purpose of implementing flood prevention and protection projects and studies in areas that are subject to recurrent flooding as confirmed by a locality-certified floodplain manager.
2. Moneys in the fund may be used to mitigate future flood damage and to assist inland and coastal communities across the commonwealth that are subject to recurrent or repetitive flooding.
3. No less than 25% of the moneys disbursed from the fund each year shall be used for projects in low-income geographic areas.
4. Priority shall be given to projects that implement community-scale hazard mitigation activities that use nature-based solutions to reduce flood risk.

In addition to the conditions described above, the CFPF is guided by the following principles, regardless of region:

1. Acknowledge climate change and its consequences, and base decision making on the best available science.

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<sup>1</sup> DCR. Community Flood Preparedness Fund Grant. Retrieved from [Community Flood Preparedness Fund Grants and Loans \(virginia.gov\)](#)

2. Identify and address socioeconomic inequities and work to enhance equity through adaptation and protection efforts.
3. Utilize community and regional scale planning to the maximum extent possible, seeking region-specific approaches tailored to the needs of individual communities.
4. Understand fiscal realities and focus on the most cost-effective solutions for the protection and adaptation of communities, businesses and critical infrastructure. The solutions will, to the extent possible, prioritize effective natural solutions.
5. Recognize the importance of protecting and enhancing green infrastructure in all regions and in the coastal region, natural coastal barriers, and fish and wildlife habitat by prioritizing nature-based solutions.

Eligible activities include flood prevention and protection projects and studies, capacity building, and planning.

This plan has been developed in accordance with the guiding principles presented above.

## CFPF Criteria

Buchanan County contains the type of low-income communities that the CFPF was designed to support. The median household income in the County is less than half that of the Virginia median --\$31,956 per year, versus \$74,222 per year, in 2019 dollars according to the US Census Bureau. With this household income level, Buchanan County met the CFPF definition of a low-income community. Buchanan County's case for support for the CFPF grant was also demonstrated in the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences (VIMS) Social Vulnerability Index.<sup>2</sup> The County's seven census tracts fall into the Very High, High, and Moderate categories of the Index, as detailed in *Section X: Existing Conditions*. Further, one of Buchanan County's census tracts, 103, is a federal designated Opportunity Zone.<sup>3</sup> Identification of the County's most vulnerable areas informed the Risk Assessment and the Risk Reduction Activities.

## Summary of Plan Contents

This plan is designed to be as reader-friendly and functional as possible. It is divided into seven sections, which are detailed below.

The **Introduction, Section 1**, (this section) introduces the plan, its contents, and guiding principles.

**Goals, Section 2**, details goals that are intended to serve as plan outcomes.

The **Planning Process, Section 3**, describes the process used to prepare the plan. It identifies members of the Planning Team and how the public and other stakeholders were involved. It also includes a summary for each of the key meetings along with any associated outcomes.

**Existing Conditions, Section 4**, provides a general overview of Buchanan County, including geographic, demographic, environmental, and economic characteristics. In addition, this section discusses building characteristics and land use patterns, as well as an overview of the county's flood history and risk reduction efforts. This baseline information provides a snapshot of the planning area and helps local

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<sup>2</sup> Virginia Vulnerability Viewer. Retrieved from [VA SocialVulnerability \(vims.edu\)](https://vims.edu).

<sup>3</sup> IRS. Opportunity Zones. Retrieved from [Opportunity Zones | Internal Revenue Service \(irs.gov\)](https://www.irs.gov).

officials recognize those social, environmental, and economic factors that play a role in determining the county's vulnerability to flood hazards.

The **Capability and Capacity Assessment, Section 5**, provides an inventory and analysis of existing plans, ordinances, policies, and relevant documents that support Buchanan County in flood risk reduction efforts. The purpose of this assessment is to identify any existing gaps, opportunities, or conflicts in programs or activities that may hinder flood mitigation efforts and determine activities that should be built upon to establish successful and sustainable flood risk reduction policies, actions, and practices. Specific capabilities addressed in this section include planning and regulatory capability, staff and organizational (administrative) capability, technical capability (e.g., available data), fiscal capability, and political capability. Information was obtained through the use of review of data, review of plans, and stakeholder interviews and Planning Team meetings.

The **Risk Assessment, Section 6**, serves to identify, analyze, and assess flood hazards that threaten Buchanan County, including natural and man-made contributors to flooding within the county. A GIS structure-based risk assessment (the Flood Hazard Analysis) is provided using publicly available and county building data along with FEMA flood data. Future flood conditions are assessed in this section in terms of changes to flood frequency and severity due to climate change. The risk assessment also addresses critical facilities, vulnerable populations, and identifies areas of the county prioritized for risk reduction based on risk assessment results and community input. The risk assessment enables the County to prioritize and focus its efforts on flood hazards of greatest concern and those structures or planning areas facing the greatest risk.

The Existing Conditions summary, Capability and Capacity Assessment, and Risk Assessment, collectively, along with stakeholder and public outreach and input, serve as a basis for determining actions or projects for the Buchanan County Flood Resilience Plan, each contributing to the development and implementation of a meaningful and manageable Action Plan that is based on accurate background information.

The **Action Plan, Section 7**, identifies strategic actions that Buchanan County can implement to reduce flood risk. **X** prioritized actions are identified. Priority actions are those identified through the planning process to have the largest potential impact on flood risk reduction in the county, or are actions that are critical first steps in order to reduce risk directly or expand the county's capability to implement a range of future risk reduction actions. Priority actions are parsed into steps intended to guide the implementation process and to make actions more achievable. In addition to priority actions, supplemental actions were identified throughout the planning process and are provided in list format. Supplemental actions are those that are not considered a priority at this time, either due to their potential for risk reduction relative to other actions, their complexity, or the county's ability to implement given current resources and capabilities.

Lastly, the Appendices provide documentation including Appendix A: Adoption Resolution and Appendix B: Building Data Overview.