Expand Community Hubs for Resilience

PENOBSCOT CLIMATE ACTION

HIGH POTENTIAL
to build community resilience

Description of the Action

Resilience hubs are community-serving – and often community-led but supported by local government – places that share resources and information, provide care during disasters, and support year-round community programming focused on climate resilience and other community needs. Resilience hubs can look and operate differently in different places based on community needs. Resilience hubs can be physical places that are accessible and have been made resilient to disasters like floods, heat waves, and power outages in order to serve as cooling centers, warming centers, or places of refuge. They may be located in community centers, libraries, housing complexes, places of worship, or similar spaces.

The Penobscot Climate Action region has an established network of warming and cooling centers managed by municipalities and community-based organizations. Additionally, the region includes community-based organizations that support community resilience in a variety of ways such as supporting food access, housing security, and more. This toolkit focuses on a community-driven approach to strengthening and expanding this network to ensure resilience to climate hazards like flooding, storms, and extreme heat as well as identifying ways to build upon and provide resources to this network so that it can meet additional community needs.

Planning will include assessing existing capacity (e.g., community spaces and programs that currently support community resilience), identifying gaps or needs for

specific services (e.g., warming/cooling centers, community kitchens, mutual aid, educational programming, other), and outlining approaches to expand on existing capacity or fill gaps. Planning will also include outlining an operational plan for the network, including how the network will coordinate around long-term capacity and strategy, as well as communicate and coordinate resources in emergencies. Efforts should include a focus on addressing the needs of people who will be disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change, particularly unsheltered people or people facing food insecurity. Further, it will be critical for these actions to be developed in conversation with any transportation related efforts, since access to shelter and food is dependent on access to transportation in the region.

Steps for Implementation

PHASE 1

Groundwork

Inventory Existing Capacity and Assess Gaps – Conduct an inventory of existing spaces and services that support community resilience, considering existing warming and cooling centers' locations, populations served, historical demand/usage, amenities (heating, cooling, kitchen, emergency power, flood protection, public transportation, ADA accessibility, etc.) to identify gaps and how to fill them. Community kitchens have been discussed as a possible added service; similar additional community needs should be identified in this phase. This phase would also collect information on community-based organizations that are

How This Action Supports the Goals of Penobscot Climate Action

★ **Equity and Environmental Justice.** Resilience hubs are designed to meet the needs of the community. As community-serving, community-led assets, they should take care to address needs of the region's most vulnerable residents during crises and year-round.

★ **Environmental Health.** Resilience hubs are ideally housed in buildings that have been built, or retrofitted over time to be energy efficient and powered by renewable energy systems, such as solar and storage. Year-round programming at the resilience hubs can also increase resource and information sharing on energy efficiency or sustainability resources for residents.

★ **Community Resilience.** Resilience hubs support community resilience through providing a resilient physical location (e.g., accessible warming and cooling centers during a climate hazard) as well as build social resilience by providing a means to share information, resources, and care among community members, community organizations, and municipalities.

★ **Regional Collaboration.** Many of the community organizations who will participate in and support the operation of resilience hubs are regional organizations and the hubs can serve as a way to connect them with residents throughout the community. Further, the region could establish a central staffing or governance entity to facilitate the activities of resilience hubs across the region.

Photo in upper left by Town of Orono

interested in supporting a resilience hubs network and how (e.g., with space, outreach, staff/volunteers, materials, etc).

Establish Project Team, Build Partnerships, Set Goals – Working as a region, the key partners for implementation should be convened to set short and long-term goals for the resilience hubs network based on data gathered in Step 1 and capabilities of the key partners. This may include a vision for incrementally building capacity for the municipality/region from expanding cooling capacity at existing warming centers to eventually providing year-round programming with added services that have been identified as needs. It may by important to identify a way to support a regional coordinator of the resilience hubs network with various community-based organizations and municipalities supporting individual sites or services provided across sites. Resilience hub network partners' capabilities and

KEY PARTNERS

- **Community buildings (e.**g., schools, libraries, youth/senior centers, places of worship, community organizations) and others who could provide space for resilience hub activities)
- **Municipalities**
- **Community health programs and programs working with unsheltered people** (e.g., Northern Light, Needlepoint Sanctuary, Brick Church, etc.)
- **Community-based organizations** (e.g. Food and Medicine, Maine Multicultural Center, Penquis, UMAINE cooperative extension, senior centers, energy efficiency/heating assistance programs, organizations working with immigrants and new Mainers, etc.)
- **Transportation providers** (e.g., Community Connector, Penquis, etc.)
- **Emergency management agencies & volunteer organizations** (e.g., Penobscot County Emergency Management Agency, Penquis Medical Reserve Corps)

commitments could be documented in a memorandum of understanding (MOU). In addition to an MOU, an outcome of this partnership-building effort should include a plan for governance of the resilience hubs network including a framework for decision-making and a plan for ongoing communication.

PHASE 2

Program Design and Development

Identify & Evaluate Sites – This step will include evaluating existing and potential new community resilience hubs sites to understand suitability to provide services as part of the resilience hubs network. Things like proximity to transportation services, flood vulnerability, and other resiliency features will be important to assess as will

Opportunity for Municipal Action

The steps under Phase 1: Groundwork are envisioned as a regional planning effort; however, an individual municipality could do this work individually. The primary benefit of a regional effort is to minimize the time commitment for community-based organizations who provide services to multiple communities. Next steps will vary based upon the outcome and goals set. It is likely that project-specific funding to enable facility improvements or fund expanded programming will be sought at this stage. Subsequent steps could be led by community-based organizations who will be hosting or managing resilience hubs with municipal support, or vice versa. Different models may be used in different communities. The following steps are likely to be taken for specific sites or services that the project team pursues.

Connections Across Existing Work and Other Climate Action Strategies

The region has a well-established network of warming centers that are used on the coldest days of the year, especially by unsheltered people, and provide charging locations when power outages impact the region. There is an opportunity to build upon this network to ensure these sites are resilient to power outages and to add cooling capabilities. Should the resilience hubs include year-round programming, they can be a venue to provide education and share resources that support healthy and thriving communities. Regional planning has identified many organizations and partners who have resources to share but would benefit from being part of a network to reach a wider audience with their information and services. This toolkit could align with Complete and Walkable Neighborhoods (Toolkit #5) considering how resilience hubs could be a component of complete neighborhoods.

consideration of the specific needs of the population the site will serve. It's also important to consider whether the facility or organization is trusted by the population to be served. Sites in the region's resilience hubs network may operate differently based upon population served.

Identify Resilience Solutions – This step is about planning to ensure the facility is prepared to meet the needs it is intended to fulfill. This would address mitigating any flood risk, ensuring resilient power (e.g., solar and storage), discussing staffing, and similar measures. "Resilience solutions" may also include programming such as educational offerings, programs that support social connectedness, and care such as a plan for neighbor wellness checks during emergencies.

PHASE 3

Development of Site, Program, and Operations

Develop Site and Install Solutions – This step includes conducting facility upgrades/resilience retrofits, if applicable. If the resilience hub (or warming or cooling center) is located within a community-based organization's facility, the municipality may be able to play a key role in securing funding or a portion of funding for designated resilience hubs hosted by community-based organizations.

Developing an Operations Plan – Developing an operations plan for the site will support readiness for new and pre-existing sites/community-based organizations to carry out their role within the resilience hubs network – both for emergency situations but also for any ongoing purposes like supporting educational programs. This will include staff/volunteer management, ensuring adequate resources are available to hubs, and outreach so that community members are aware of the available services and sites. See the case study on O'ahu, HI in the "Precedents" section for one example of how a region uses different operating models for its resilience hubs.

RESOURCES TO GET STARTED

- **Urban Sustainability Directors Network Guidance on Resilience Hubs** - including **Guide to Developing Resilience Hubs** which outlines a phases approach to establishing a resilience hub.
- **Washington DC Community Resilience Hubs Resource** – This resource, developed by Washington DC as part of it's municipal climate action plan, gives a great overview of the goals and functions of a resilience hub network.
- **Community Cooling Center Guidance** – Guidance from the Maine Emergency Management Agency on implementing cooling centers.

PRECEDENTS

- **"Resilience Hubs Can Help Communities Thrive"** – an article by Pew Charitable Trusts that highlights work in Baltimore and Minneapolis to build out resilience hubs and demonstrates the adaptability of resilience hubs to look and operate differently based on the community's needs.
- **Baltimore, MD** has been working with a network of existing community-based organizations to coordinate efforts, share resources, and build the capacity of the organizations as part of a resilience hub network.
- **Minneapolis, MN** has been working to build resilience at "mobility hubs," key public spaces where people come to access transportation modes.
- **Medford, MA** completed this preliminary assessment to identify goals and suitable sites for resilience hubs. The City has since developed an onboarding tool and operations plan for the resilience hub network.
- **O'ahu, HI** has established a network of resilience hubs in urban and rural parts of the island. They offer examples of different types of operations for "blue sky" and "gray sky" scenarios as well as levels of services offered.
- **This Climate One podcast** profiles examples of communities taking action toward climate resilience, including mutual aid and resilience hubs.

COST CONSIDERATIONS

- The initial assessment and planning effort may cost $50,000 - $150,000 depending upon scope and assuming a planning consultant is engaged to facilitate the process.
- Subsequent implementation steps can vary widely. For example, funding a part-time coordinator to plan programming and manage communications for the region's Resilient Hub Network could be less than $50,000 per year but identifying sustained funding would be important. Whereas adding air conditioning to a school may be a one-time cost in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

POTENTIAL SOURCES FOR FUNDING

- **Community Change Grants** - EPA funding for community-based organizations (in partnership with Tribes, local governments, and/or higher education) for environmental justice and climate justice activities. Resilience hubs are identified as an eligible activity.
- **Community Development Block Grant** - assists units of local government in various community projects in areas ranging from infrastructure, housing, downtown revitalization to public facilities and economic development.
- **Efficiency Maine Municipal Electrification Retrofits** - (eligible communities: Brewer, Hampden, Hermon, Old Town)
- **Federal Clean Energy and Climate Funding** - includes several Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funding programs, including the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant.
- **Community Services Block Grant** - Grant recipients and Community Action Agencies can leverage funding to support activities to mitigate heat stress including, but not limited to, establishing neighborhood cooling centers and transporting people to cooling centers.
- **AARP Community Challenge Grant** - The program is intended to help communities make immediate improvements and jump-start long-term progress in support of residents of all ages.
- **Private Foundations,** such as the Maine Community Foundation and others, can provide support for various climate, community, equity, and related initiatives.