



Finish the Job. Fix the System.

**Recommendations from High River for
Alberta's Disaster Recovery Program**

Submitted by:
High River Disaster Recovery Program Advocacy Committee
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Introduction

The High River Disaster Recovery Program Advocacy Committee (DRPAC) was formed to focus on finding solutions and improvements for the residents of High River dealing with the Disaster Recovery Program (DRP) after the devastating flood of June 2013.

After considerable time, consultation and effort, the committee has two simple requests on behalf of the residents of High River and for the benefit of all Albertans.

Finish the Job.

Fix the System.

Number One: Finish the Job

The DRPAC asks that the Government of Alberta take the necessary steps to expedite completion of all outstanding files by June 20, 2016 and that all outstanding appeals be closed by December 31, 2016. Further, that all necessary efforts be undertaken to ensure this process is brought to completion with appropriate respect and compassion for the victims of the High River flood.

Number Two: Fix the System

The DRPAC asks that the Government of Alberta commit to complete a thorough and open external review of the DRP as it has been conducted in High River and other communities in order to facilitate a redevelopment of this program to address the significant program failures experienced in response to the 2013 High River flood. The review should include consultation with external parties including municipalities.

The recommendations included in this report are based on the experiences of residents as they made application to DRP, had their files processed and eventually closed. The recommendations for redevelopment of the DRP are intended to spare other Alberta communities impacted by large-scale disasters from suffering the same failures experienced in High River.

The Scope of the Disaster in High River

On June 20, 2013 the Highwood River reached a flow rate of 1,850 cubic metres per second, overflowing its banks and flooding the Town of High River. This triggered the evacuation of 13,400 people, 5,400 homes and 6,300 structures.¹ Additionally 1,100 pets had to be rescued. Tragically, five lives were also lost in southern Alberta, including two people in High River.

The numbers cannot begin to describe the impact on the individuals who lost everything. In addition to the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing and household goods, family treasures such as family photos, favourite heirlooms, and other belongings were destroyed. Lives were disrupted. All businesses were impacted. The hospital was closed and patients moved. Schools were closed. Long-term financial implications developed along with all of the accompanying challenges from severe family stress to serious health impacts. Virtually everyone in town was affected, leaving the entire community vulnerable.



With the support from provincial agencies, non-profit organizations, first responders, neighbouring communities and thousands of volunteers, High River has substantially recovered. However, the town's recovery will not be complete until all Disaster Recovery Program applications are finally closed and all residents can move on with their lives.

Disaster Recovery Program

On June 28, 2013, Order in Council 202/2013 declared a State of Emergency existed in the Town of High River.² With the declaration of a disaster, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) moved into disaster operations mode. Alberta Regulation 51/94 of the Alberta Emergency Management Act allows the province to provide disaster recovery assistance to residents, small business, agriculture operations, and provincial and municipal governments if the event meets the criteria as

¹ http://highriver.ca/images/Protective_Services/2014/AfterActionReport_07-28_web.pdf Accessed: November 2, 2015

² http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/orders/orders_in_council/2013/613/2013_202.html Accessed: November 1, 2015

outlined in the regulation. The Disaster Recovery Program is the program used to deliver this assistance.

The primary role of the DRP is the administration of financial aid to those negatively affected by a disaster. The intention of this financial support is to assist affected communities and their businesses and residents to take the steps necessary to recover and create their new normal environment. The High River experience has shown it is absolutely critical that the DRP program be structured and delivered in an environment motivated by compassion and understanding. It is also essential that DRP staff be respectful of, and guided by, the reality that the individuals requiring financial support have already been traumatized by the disaster itself.

“We are going to do...whatever it takes to get everyone back to a place where they can continue to live their lives.”

- Premier Alison Redford

Impact of Expectations

From the beginning of the disaster response process, community expectations were influenced by announcements and promises made by senior bureaucrats and elected officials from all levels of government.

- Prime Minister Stephen Harper - *“The federal government is taking swift action to help... and our Government stands ready to provide all the support required”*³
- Premier Alison Redford - *“ We are going to do – please listen to my words – whatever it takes to get everyone back to a place where they can continue to live their lives.”*⁴

At the same time, there were significant differences of interpretation regarding the purpose and intention of DRP payments throughout the province. Affected residents of flood-impacted communities had little or no previous experience with how complicated and bureaucratic the DRP would be. Understandably, the nature of the process itself would have a major impact on the expectations created during the Flood of 2013.

Unfortunately DRP regulations and organizational structure were not robust enough to effectively respond to the number and complexity of claims made in High River within a reasonable time. A key lesson from this

³ <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2013/06/21/pm-visits-flood-affected-regions-alberta> Accessed: November 1, 2015

⁴ <http://www.citynews.ca/2013/06/24/alberta-government-gives-1b-for-flood-relief/>

is the importance that DRP preparedness models need to be able to scale up quickly in response to overwhelming disasters.

DRP Principles

The following is an excerpt from the 2012 Ministerial Order establishing the Disaster Assistance Guidelines:

1.2.1 DRPs are intended to assist in:

- *Providing or reinstating the basic essentials of life to individuals, including financial assistance to help repair and restore damaged homes;*
- *Re-establishing or maintaining the viability of small businesses and working farms; and*
- *Repairing, rebuilding and restoring public works and the essential community services specified in these Guidelines to their pre-disaster functional capabilities.⁵*

The key phrase is ‘the basic essentials of life’ – which has different meaning depending on your personal situation. Applicants also found during the DRP process that procedures were inconsistently applied to determine eligibility for DRP payments.

Unfortunately, it did not take long before the victims of the flood realized that the DRP did not meet expectations. For many, the DRP process itself was re-traumatizing for those who had lost so much – in some cases everything.



⁵ http://www.aema.alberta.ca/images/Disaster_Assistance_Guidelines%282%29.pdf Accessed: November 1, 2015

Creation of the High River DRP Advocacy Committee

In November 2013, volunteers approached the Council of the Town of High River and offered to create the Disaster Recovery Program Advocacy Committee (DRPAC). It had become evident that the DRP process was so frustrating and complex that many applicants were unable to advocate on their own behalf. Applications were being lost; supporting receipts were not attached to applications; and, it was taking a long time for application processing. Many applicants also experienced a new bureaucratic face with each DRP appointment forcing them to explain again the details of their experience. **The complexity of the DRP claims process was, itself, the single most significant barrier to residents making applications.**

Residents continued to be emotionally distraught and unable to effectively manage the complex and ill-defined processes involved in their DRP applications. Many residents had already experienced challenging interactions with authorities – insurance adjusters, contractors, the RCMP, and officials from Municipal and Provincial agencies and departments.

Applicants were experiencing insensitivity, inconsistent information, lack of transparency, and unreasonable expectations to provide documents and information.

The following mandate was approved for the DRPAC by the Council of the Town of High River ⁶

- Advocate for, coordinate, assist and support residents and businesses in their efforts to obtain funding from the various funding agencies, including the DRP.
- Provide information and communication for the general public on DRP procedures, and work on individual solutions.

The committee was also tasked to report to Town Council and Administration and identify process improvements, gaps and issues to streamline High River's recovery. Original committee members were: Chairman Jim Ross, Councillor Bruce Masterman, Debra Smith, Tom Dutton, and Bill Fowler.

The complexity of the DRP claims process was, itself, the single most significant barrier to residents making applications.

⁶ http://highriver.ca/images/Leg_Services/2013/Minutes/November_25_2013_RM.pdf Accessed: November 1, 2015

The DRPAC has held meetings with numerous officials. Elected provincial officials included three Premiers of Alberta, several Ministers of Municipal Affairs, Highwood MLAs Danielle Smith and Wayne Anderson, and our Member of Parliament John Barlow.

Multiple cabinet appointments and a Provincial election have clearly had a significant impact on the Committee's ability to achieve concrete results. Additionally, the contract with the DRP services supplier, Landlink, was not renewed which resulted in the files being turned over to the province in the middle of the claims process. This caused additional administrative churn, including a six-month delay in payments in 2015.

Meetings were held and, where appropriate, continue to be held with various levels of management in the Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA), Disaster Recovery Program (DRP), and the Flood Recovery Task Force (FRTF). Contact has also been made with local Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), and the Provincial Insurance and DRP Advisory Committee.

Discussion at these meetings continues to focus on:

- Importance of settling claims and appeals
- Need to bring resolution to the outstanding operational concerns
- Making improvements to DRP before the next disaster occurs

During discussions, committee members would present specific examples to indicate the need for process improvements. The committee continues to be disappointed by the lengthy list of matters still to be addressed. As one committee member recently stated: "It is the same thing over and over again since 2013. "

The DRPAC has documented over 100 specific issues that have stopped, slowed or hindered the resolution of applicant files.

Achievements of the DRP Advocacy Committee

As a result of the work of the DRPAC, progress has been made and improvements have been achieved. Unfortunately, the progress occurs only in those areas where consistent pressure is applied. Though DRP administration states it is willing to work toward improvement, real changes are only made when the DRPAC acts like a watchdog and maintains pressure to keep the changes in place.

Through its efforts, the DRPAC has achieved the following regulatory changes and process improvements:

- Some changes have been adopted in the categorization and tracking of applicant files
- Changes to DRP policies including:
 1. Older/Vintage Home Policy to respond to unique circumstances
 2. More funding for residential applicants with sub-limits on their sewer back-up insurance coverage
 3. More funding for small business
 - a. Ineligibility due to lack of Flood Insurance for business has been reversed
 - b. Flood Insurance deductibles are now considered for reimbursement through DRP
 4. Increased the multiplier for household damage calculations to reflect local costs
 5. The deadline for applying to the DRP for the 2013 Floods has been eliminated in circumstances where it was unfair
- Increased monetary authorization amounts within DRP to allow for quicker processing
- Advances to applicants have increased from 50 per cent to 90 per cent
- Adoption of a “caseworker model” for business applications and the appeal process
- Limited improvement in the establishment of a “service oriented” and empathic approach during applicant interactions
- Established collaborative relationships to expedite critical files
- Supported Town community outreach workers who offered workshops to teach residents how to apply, review and appeal their claims
- Modest improvement to the Rebuild Rate from 1.1 to 1.14
- Requested improvements in communication especially for applicants, to ensure that all cheques include a Turnaround (TA) statement. These statements provide details for the payment issued.

Unfortunately, the progress only occurs in those areas where consistent pressure is applied.

Continuing Issues with the DRP in High River

While some improvements have been implemented, primarily as a result of the activities of the High River DRP Advocacy Committee, substantial improvement is still required. Changes are necessary in three major areas in order for the committee to be satisfied that it has fulfilled its mandate on behalf of High River and future DRP applicants. The three areas are:

1. Claims Processing and Administration Issues
 - a. Establish a more consistent and effective case manager approach for the entire application and appeal process
 - b. Increase local authority level for approving applications
2. Systemic and Operational Issues
 - a. Establish a basic office setup appropriate to the local situation
 - b. Create a DRP Process Manual and Training
 - c. Create an IT system that supports the processes and the large amount of information in the DRP environment
 - d. Process outstanding files in a timely manner
3. Public Policy Issues
 - a. Determine accountability for the failure to meet expectations of the DRP process
 - b. Standardize language for DRP
 - c. Ensure that AEMA is appropriately resourced to integrate the lessons learned from the Flood of 2013 into the agency's planning and operations

The following paragraphs articulate specific recommendations along with the experiences and factors that led to the identification of these areas.

1. Claims Processing and Administrative Issues

a. Establish a more consistent and effective case manager approach for the entire application and appeal process.

The case manager model creates a single contact for the applicant. This allows for immediate triaging regarding support needed – whether financial, social, medical and/or emotional. Severity of need could also be readily identified. The initial DRP approach was to process applications to ensure that administrative and audit functions could be supported. By using case managers for all stages of application evaluation, the framework could introduce social services and humanitarian support before the audit step.

Appropriate training of staff for skill and leadership development, sensitivity training and DRP knowledge should improve satisfaction for applicants and staff. Improved training should hopefully reduce the turnover rate among the DRP staff.

Caseload measures could be introduced to monitor the typical profile of applicants and identify common challenges encountered throughout the entire DRP process. By its structure, the case manager approach would also create a scalable model with the built-in flexibility to react depending on the scale of the disaster and the number of anticipated applicants.

External resource staff have documented and reported that the current approach used for application processing has resulted in lost documents, inconsistent application of definitions, unclear instructions as to next steps, and uncertainty regarding what stage a claim was at and what should happen next. Especially frustrating was that the majority of applicants had to re-tell their story numerous times. All of this created doubt in the minds of applicants as to the completeness of their file.



b. Increase local authority level for approving applications.

Spending authority should be delegated and exercised by on-site officials. The spending authority levels should reflect the specific circumstances of the disaster. Assurance should also be given that local department officials will have the willingness to exercise this authority. This would contribute to faster decision-making and presentation of options to applicants. Any efforts that give back decision-making opportunities to residents will increase recovery success.

Although some improvements to process have been achieved, the hesitation by local authorities to implement these changes has reduced the impact of the changes. For example, even though there was a policy change to increase advances from 50 per cent to 90 per cent of claim amount, there was minimal use of the program.

While both of these areas have improved in the local DRP situation, the committee feels that these initiatives should become standard operating procedure for DRP in Alberta.

2. Systemic and Operational Issues

a. Establish a basic office set-up appropriate to local situation.

Appropriate office resources should be available including staff and public-use computers with scanners, photocopiers, and predictable hours of operation. Examples exist where access to files and internet use by applicants was denied; even computer screens were blocked so applicants could not see their personal application information.

In-person opportunities for applicant triage should also be an integral step of the welcoming in the office. Appropriate staffing resources should be made available based on the experience of previous DRP volumes.

b. Create a DRP Process Manual and Training.

The creation of a user-friendly DRP process manual that contains the appropriate definitions, application forms and checklists is absolutely needed. These source documents, along with practice procedure manuals and reference guides such as the 'mini-manual', must be made available in print and online. Easy access will allow applicants and staff to work with consistent information when considering applications. Training for community advocates and residents is required to help with interpretation and completion of application forms to highlight individual situations.

Especially critical for all involved is the establishment of a glossary of definitions for terms used in the DRP process. Files were delayed because of misunderstandings. For example, the terms receipts and invoices were not consistently applied.

Exceptions are to be expected to address unusual situations, however, these must be elevated to senior management through the case manager or other official intervention and should not be in response to media or political pressure.

c. Create an IT system that supports the processes and the large amount of information in the DRP environment.

A robust IT system has to be part of DRP operations. The system should allow for the scanning of receipts and applicant hand-written information. The standard should be to have one electronic file per claim that would be accessible in the local DRP office and by other agencies and government departments across Alberta. This would ensure that when there is an update to policy the changes would trigger an alert on the file and eliminate the possibility of lost eligibility. The ideal result would be that applicants would

have online access to their information to ensure the correct documents are on file and to check on the status of their applications.

A functional IT system would provide management with the information necessary about the number and status of applications so that appropriate resources could be added to maintain reasonable processing time. A DRP-focused IT system could also be programmed to guarantee that cheques would always be issued with accompanying detailed supporting documentation such as Turn-Around reports.

Documentation and file accessibility would also reduce the instances when applicants were forced to use Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act procedures to receive copies of documents pertaining to their application.

d. Process outstanding files in a timely manner.

More than two years and five months later, a large number of *Open* and *To Be Appealed* files still remain. As of November 13, 2015 there were still 422 Open files and 84 files under appeal.⁷ Current estimates are that with the existing closure rate it could take more than a year to close all these files. An established system of accountability is required whereby files that have not been actioned over a set time would be flagged for immediate attention.



⁷ <http://www.aema.alberta.ca/documents/Status-of-Disaster-Recovery-Program-applications-Town-of-High-River.pdf> Accessed Nov 26, 2015

3. Public policy issues

a. Determine accountability for the failure to meet expectations of the DRP process.

Expectations of applicants, civic leaders, non-profits, first responders, and Albertans have been unfulfilled since Flood 2013. Accountability for promises made must be addressed.

b. Standardize language for DRP.

What does 'basic essentials of life' mean in the context of DRP? What does this mean for returning homeowners and businesses? Expectations grew due to the lack of understanding that the program is not insurance and perceived inconsistencies in the application of the program. It is important to communicate that the intent of the DRP is to ensure the survival and rehabilitation of an entire community, not to simply act as a form of supplemental insurance for residents, small business and non-profits.

c. Ensure that AEMA is appropriately resourced to integrate the lessons learned from the Flood of 2013 into the agency's planning and operations.

The ordering of improvements could be determined using the recommendations of this report together with the recommendations found in previous government commissioned post-disaster reports. These recommendations have been drawn from the following sources:

1. Various DRPAC reports provided to Ministers of Municipal Affairs and the town of High River
2. Lessons learned from outreach workers.
3. Provincial Flood Mitigation Report: Consultations and Recommendations
Submitted by George Groeneveld, MLA Highwood
November 2006
4. AEMA Disaster Recovery Program Review
Conducted by KPMG May 31, 2012
5. Lesser Slave Lake Regional Urban Interface Wildfire –
Lessons Learned
Final Report November 6, 2012
6. Flood Recovery in High River
Conference Board of Canada report September 2015

Recommendations from High River DRP Advocacy Committee

While the detailed and categorized list is contained in Appendix I, the following table contains the major recommendations of the Disaster Recovery Program Advocacy Committee.

Recommendations	Anticipated Outcomes
1. Claims Processing and Administrative Issues	
a. Establish a case manager approach for the entire application and appeal process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creates accountability ▪ Reduces the impersonal relationship between applicants and DRP employees ▪ Improves productivity
b. Increase local authority level for approving claims and provide support to exercise increased authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improves accuracy and timeliness of payments ▪ Improves overall adjudication of claims
2. Systemic and Operational Issues	
a. Basic office set-up adapted to the local situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applicants have access to services and technology required for DRP process ▪ Ensures visibility and accessibility ▪ Staff have necessary resources to serve clients
b. Re-evaluate processes and documentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Create a publicly accessible DRP process and damage payment manual ii) Ensure staff have adequate training iii) Create information tools for applicants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduce frustration when expectations are not met ▪ Improve efficiency of DRP operation ▪ Empower staff with a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities ▪ Establish a baseline for operational expectations and accountability with improved follow-up
c. Create an IT system that supports all aspects of the DRP process from intake, application, appeal and file closure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improves efficiency and access to information for applicants and DRP staff ▪ Reduces frequency of lost documents ▪ Enables an efficient audit trail ▪ Improves statistical reporting
d. Process applications in a timely manner with procedures that focus on speedy cheque issuance along with streamlined approval and audit steps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduces uncertainty pending applicants approval ▪ Reduces time lag for applicants to get back to normal.

Recommendations	Anticipated Outcomes
3. Public Policy issues	
<p>a. Establish a culture of accountability, transparency and customer service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Generate public trust in the DRP process. ▪ Establish expectations for future implementations of DRP ▪ Timely communication of all policy changes ▪ Clarity may minimize the potential for unreasonable political promises being made
<p>b. Standardize language for DRP with definitions and standardized reporting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comparison of reports was difficult due to changing definitions and new categories. ▪ Not all applicants were able to discern the nuanced language being used.
<p>c. Ensure AEMA is appropriately resourced to integrate the lessons learned from the 2013 flood</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved sensitivity towards the applicants. ▪ Greater efficiency and effectiveness
<p>d. Affirm the purpose of DRP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase the probability that expectations will match DRP purpose. ▪ Improve understanding of politicians, municipalities, community leaders and general public.

Conclusion

The Town of High River DRP Advocacy Committee represents personal and community experience that substantiates our role as advocates as to how the delivery of DRP could be improved. There is a great deal of passion driving the recommendation to review the entire DRP process to ensure no community would ever have to deal with these same issues again. While it is important that a review take place, our first priority is that the outstanding claims and appeals of High River need to be addressed. The committee's immediate requests are:

1. **Finish the Job** by resolving:
 - a. All outstanding files by June 20, 2016
 - b. All appeals by December 31, 2016

Further, that all necessary efforts are undertaken to ensure this process is brought to completion with all appropriate respect and compassion for the victims of the High River flood.

2. **Fix the System**

The DRPAC asks that the Government of Alberta commit to complete a thorough, external review of the DRP as it has been conducted in High River and other communities in order to facilitate a redevelopment of this program to address the significant program failures experienced in response to the 2013 High River flood.

Senior management from the DRP has made a commitment to review all of the more than 10,000 DRP files across southern Alberta once the claims and appeals are resolved. The DRP Advocacy Committee supports this commitment and is willing to aid the process in any way.

Although the recommendations in this report derive from the specific experiences of the High River community, the importance of a review of the DRP process is critical to all Albertans. The AEMA and DRP are the safety net for all Alberta communities – it would be yet another tragic failure if no lessons are learned or no improvements are made.

Additional References and Acknowledgements

This report relied heavily on a variety reports and other documents including:

November 2006 Provincial Flood Mitigation Report: Consultations and Recommendations
Submitted by George Groeneveld, MLA Highwood

Lessons learned from outreach workers.

May 31, 2012 AEMA Disaster Recovery Program Review
Conducted by KPMG

March 30, 2014 Insurance and Disaster Recovery Program Advisory Committee Summary of Work and Findings
Tom C. Dutton (Chair), Julie G. Hopkins, David A. Buzzeo

May 10, 2014 Disaster Recovery Program Barriers
Presented by Sarah Bruinsma and Eleanor Macdonald; High River
community outreach workers.

Various DRPAC reports to Ministers of Municipal Affairs and High River Town Council.

Additional material generously shared by the DRP Advocacy Committee members.

We would like to thank the innumerable residents of High River who have shared their stories with us to help us understand the scope and nature of the problems with the Disaster Recovery Program.

Tom Dutton

Jim Ross, Chair

Debra Smith

*Bruce Masterman
High River Town Council*

Appendix 1: Consolidated List of Recommendations

Ongoing DRP Issues	Problem encountered	Recommendations
Claims Processing and Administration 1 (CPA)	Unacceptable number of DRP files are still open.	Implement relevant DRPAC recommendations immediately.
CPA 2	Poor and inconsistent communication was experienced by residents as they began the application process. Insufficient information was provided outlining what is and is not funded	Make available immediately such documents as the mini-manual and forms required for DRP application, in print and online. Ensure a glossary of DRP-related definitions is created to be included in all applicant documents and correspondence. Provide proper training of DRP staff on the approved nomenclature
CPA 3	No or minimal documentation was included with cheques given to applicants. Information was not easily provided outlining what is and is not funded and why	Applicants need to be informed as to how their payment was determined. Correspondence must include detailed statement of payment calculation and Turn Around policy information. An outline of next steps regarding appeal process and relevant forms should also be included. Ideally online access to applications would be available for applicants.
CPA 4	Lack of communication by DRP staff as to next steps and timelines.	Design processes that are concentrated on continually moving files forward, including resolving issues, providing clarity, outlining options and next steps. Always communicate with applicants with transparency and openness.
CPA 5	Lost files and documents	Create a DRP Document control unit to maintain processing and content standards. Establish an online system so applicants can view file updates and file contents.

Ongoing DRP Issues	Problem encountered	Recommendations
CPA 6	Lack of Case Closure letters. Many applicants were not aware that their file was considered closed and that there is a right to appeal	All payments should include a letter with explanation of both eligible and ineligible items. Also include outline of next steps and any applicable deadline periods. Included in the same envelope should be: a) blank appeal form b) 'How to' guide on completing appeal c) Schedule 2 mini-manual d) Phone number or websites for further assistance
CPA 7	DRP staff were not customer service oriented	Create a culture that is applicant focused helping people to resolve issues. Staff training should include effective listening skills, conflict resolution, mediation, and a strong customer service emphasis.
CPA 8	Too many staff involved with each individual application	Adoption of case manager approach should reduce the number of staff involved in the processing of each application.
CPA 9	Applicants were not triaged according to the amount of the damage i.e. still out of their homes, dealing with structural and mould issues, etc.	Implement case manager approach. Create criteria so that applications will be classified regarding high priority and/or complexity so files can be actioned according to the hardship experienced by the applicant.
CPA 10	DRP staff were not properly trained or supported by managers to recognize and react to their stress and trauma experiences of applicants	Provide specialized trained staff to be assigned to assist people with language barriers, illiteracy or mental health capacity issues
CPA 11	Not enough staff in general - in both DRP and Appeals departments. Unmanageable case loads causes undue hardship for staff and applicants	100% adoption of Case manager approach should include reasonable caseload criteria. For example social work standards are 25-35 files per case manager. Improvements should be seen as staff are handling manageable case loads.

Ongoing DRP Issues	Problem encountered	Recommendations
CPA 12	DRP staff experienced high workloads and stress causing staff burnout and high turnover	Improve training, leadership and management of DRP staff. Provide opportunity for staff to debrief.
CPA 13	Match DRP staff training and skills to type of files assigned to them	DRP staff should have technical knowledge to consider specific situations such as structural and mould issues.
CPA 14	Eliminate culture of secrecy. Applicants were stopped from viewing computer screens when meeting with staff	Produce and provide DER, policy TA or simple evaluation forms to document every applicant visit. Fulfill applicant requests for personal and relevant information so the use of FOIP requests by applicants is eliminated.
CPA 15	Bureaucratic wording of letters to applicants created uncertainty and confusion. Inconsistent usage of terms also a factor.	Ensure a glossary of DRP-related definitions is created. Include in all applicant documents and correspondence. Provide proper training of DRP staff on the approved nomenclature. Letters written to applicants need to be in layman's terms. Clear wording would eliminate confusion.
CPA 16	During application process inconsistent requests were made i.e. stating receipts not needed and then asking for them in next paragraph	Clear guidelines are needed regarding requirements for receipts, quotations and other supporting documentation. All communication whether verbal or written should be recorded with application. Outgoing correspondence to contain clear information regarding current status and next steps.
CPA 17	Proactive analysis did not take place within DRP to identify trends, issues and barriers that slowed application processing (i.e. building factor, mould concerns)	Create a culture of awareness within DRP, so that any barriers and inefficiencies are identified and remedied quickly. Improve monitoring to determine why there are delays in settlements of applications so action can be taken to resolve bottle necks.
CPA 18	Lack of confidentiality and privacy	Ensure proper office set-up to allow for privacy

Ongoing DRP Issues	Problem encountered	Recommendations
CPA 19	All communications with applicants (including conversations) were not documented.	Policy must require that all communication with applicants (including conversations) must be documented and recorded in applicants file. Clarity and consistency in documentation needed
CPA 20	DRP made multiple requests for information from insurance companies, leading to inefficiencies and files on hold.	Standardized forms requesting information from insurance companies should be used. Develop forms in discussion with the insurance industry.
CPA 21	Obtaining quotes – contractors were overwhelmed with number of requests for quotes that did not result in work. Applicants were told that the quote had 'expired' before the file was processed. DRP was inconsistent whether to pay applicants or contractors for the preparation of quotes.	Requirements for quotes, receipts and other documentation must be in written policy. Content standards should be clear, reasonable and readily available.
CPA 22	Applicants could not easily find out at what stage their application was at within DRP	Adoption of case manager system would allow single access point for applicants to easily get their questions answered.
CPA 23	Unclear understanding of appeal structure. Lack of clarity for applicants regarding process and eligible items.	Provide seminars so that applicants are informed and understand how to complete appeal documents properly. Create checklist system in appeal process to prevent circling back to applicants. Appeals staff should be actively engaging with applicants to ensure all eligible items are considered.
CPA 24	Evaluation of applications with structural issues takes too long to complete	Standardize requirements as to content and format for reports received from engineers. Clearly defined processes and standard requirements must be in place. There must be written policy and readily available.

Ongoing DRP Issues	Problem encountered	Recommendations
CPA 25	Appeals involving structural issues	Structural appeals should be expedited given the time sensitivity due to age of quote and limits to building season.
CPA 26	Insufficient detail regarding what appeal payment was covering	Always include complete breakdown of total file payments when a cheque is issued. Especially needed at the conclusion of appeal, include both eligible and ineligible items and why.
CPA 27	Uncertainty surrounding rebuild options	Especially important with rebuild files that sufficient detail is provided for applicants so it is easily understood what they will be receiving and how it has been calculated
CPA 28	Registration Office was not always staffed with individuals with sufficient understanding and knowledge of the DRP	Registration Centre staff need to have the necessary knowledge and training to perform their duties
CPA 29	Insufficient training or number of evaluators to prepare DER (damage evaluation report)	DER evaluators should have appropriate training. DER reports should include standardized evaluation forms in checklist format based on schedule 2/mini-manual. Checklist should be developed using evidence-based criteria on cause of damage (such as Sewer backup, overland, combo) . Report should include photos and measurements
CPA 30	A standard checklist is not used for pre-screening or evaluation at Registration	A formal screening and evaluation checklist should be used at Registration. This would allow for a triage process for Registration Centres. Consider the use a paper or online intake checklist questionnaire
CPA 31	In some cases, third party contractors (Tervita) did not provide applicant information and reports	Information and reports from third party contractors must be provided to applicants.

Ongoing DRP Issues	Problem encountered	Recommendations
CPA 32	Processing of applications for payment were delayed due to audit requirements	Adjust audit processes so identified files are pulled and not the entire batch.
CPA 33	Transition from Landlink to AEMA caused 6 month delay in cheques getting out and countless other delays	Contracted service providers and SAEMA need a transitional plan process and timeline written into contractor agreements with GoA.
Systemic and Operational 1	DRP process is accounting and administratively focused	Appropriate applicant focused procedures are key to successful program development and recovery. Human services are equal in importance to administration and accounting.
Systemic and Operational 2	Government officials were process driven and not results driven	Desired results focused on community recovery must drive the process
Systemic and Operational 3	Policy and process changes within DRP were not communicated to staff, applicants and residents. For example policy regarding the payment of contractors by Landlink or homeowners AND the Standata changes	Clear communication process has to be implemented to advise staff and applicants when policy changes are made. Who and how the changes are communicated to applicants has to be assigned. Process should ensure all DRP staff are up to date on program changes and policy systems.
Systemic and Operational 4	Applicants should have received financial assistance quicker. The KPMG 2012 audit found 15-21 weeks delivery time; timelines are much greater in 2013 disaster.	Develop and communicate clear, streamlined system for payment approval and delivery.
Systemic and Operational 5	Political announcements created additional pressure and were sometimes counterproductive (i.e. 90% complete by March 31, 2014; 90% advance up from 50%)	Better awareness and communication with political figures from upper AEMA Management. Support the creation of a community based advocacy committee to better identify, advise and address issues at a local level.

Ongoing DRP Issues	Problem encountered	Recommendations
Systemic and Operational 6	Lack of local support to assist applicants and capture trends	Once a community is approved for DRP funding, local community outreach workers should be hired as advocates for applicants
Systemic and Operational 7	Office Operations – no scanner, no posted hours of operations, slow IT system	Proper office setup that is fully functional. Share publically the application process showing the steps from original filing, review, payment and appeal, supported with a dedicated IT system.
Systemic and Operational 8	A high proportion of appeals are receiving additional funding (approx. 70%). This indicates poor processing of initial applications.	All processes and policies must be consistently applied to ensure applications are properly process and appeals are limited.
Systemic and Operational 9	Inconsistent management of DRP operations and practises	Creating standard operating procedures for DRP. Also identify the hard resources that are needed immediately for next disaster (such as IT systems, office-in-a-box systems)
Systemic and Operational 10	Document and information management requirements have not been defined.	AEMA should consider the need for an Information Governance Framework
Systemic and Operational 11	AEMA should review and improve its governance practises	Improve the structure to ensure all elements of DRP are defined and assigned. Key elements would include accountability and responsibility for performance reporting, training and supervision of registration staff and case managers; the development and implementation of new practises and procedures. Develop communications plan that assigns responsibility for internal notification and media inquiries.

Ongoing DRP Issues	Problem encountered	Recommendations
Systemic and Operational 12	Current DRP delivery processes are labour and paper intensive and rely on limited technology. Applicants face the inability to file and receive updates re status online	Implement a technology solution for program management that is applicant user-friendly and also accessible by AEMA, DRP staff and Municipal Affairs (MA) staff.
Systemic and Operational 13	Lack of automated workflow management for approval of payments	Implement a technology solution for program management. This would also allow for improved reporting of file status statistically.
Systemic and Operational 14	Multiple and extensive file reviews are completed by DRP, AEMA and MA Finance	AEMA should develop a risk based analysis for file review and approval. Acceptance of calculated risk must be adopted.
Systemic and Operational 15	Authorized spending limits were not utilized.	Review the expenditure Officer authority limits, ensuring they are consistent and appropriate with both the role of the signer and the situation. Staff must exercise the authority they have been given in the interest of expediting payments.
Systemic and Operational 16	Lack of readiness to deal with a disaster of this scale	Prior to the next disaster there needs to be an operating plan that would address availability of IT systems, deployment of initial staff, rapid setup of infrastructure required. The plan must be scalable to meet the reality of the disaster.
Systemic and Operational 17	Performance would improve if standards measured.	AEMA needs to obtain feedback from DRP applicants to inform its assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of the DRP. Broad stakeholder consultation should take place.
Systemic and Operational 18	Minimal incorporation of previous, external reviews recommendations into current DRP programs	AEMA needs to implement recommendations from KPMG; Grenoveld and Conference Board of Canada reports, especially those common to each report.

Ongoing DRP Issues	Problem encountered	Recommendations
Systemic and Operational 19	Lessons learned i.e. mould	Capture lessons learned or policies must be analysed and incorporated into future DRP policies.
Systemic and Operational 20	Internal DRP communication is inadequate. Lack of communications between DRP officials.	A more consistent and co-ordinated communications plan is required to guide internal and external announcements.
Systemic and Operational 21	Third party contractors (such as Tervita) documentation of work done on behalf of GoA not available in its entirety (i.e. videos) to DRP officials until 2015	AEMA needs to structure contractual arrangements so that work done is documented and to be included with applicants files for ease of access by applicants and DRP staff
Public Policy 1	Unmet expectations for general public	Ways are needed to increase the public's understanding as to the purpose of DRP. Clear communication of program intent is needed from the start
Public Policy 2	Lack of confidence by the community	Organize seminars and focused events for community information and updates. Consider earlier use of Door to Door Outreach model
Public Policy 3	Building standards have changed so guidelines recommending to rebuild to pre-event standards may not be allowed by current building code.	A thorough review of regulations guiding rebuilding standards has to be undertaken. There is a gap in program guidelines when current building codes require higher standards than the structures possessed at pre-event.
Public Policy 4	Allowance to pay for labour costs relating to repair and clean-up work was not sufficient	Program guidelines needs to be annually updated to meet current minimum wage. Program should increase maximum number of hours paid to 300.
Public Policy 5	Inconsistent interpretations of DRP regarding allowable items i.e. landscaping	Review and clarify DRP program guidelines. Make them readily accessible...in print and online.

Appendix 2: AUMA Extraordinary Resolution

**AUMA Extraordinary Resolution:
Disaster Recovery Program ("DRP")
Submitted by the Town of High River**

PREAMBLE:

WHEREAS the Alberta Disaster Recovery Program in its current form has proven inadequate and ineffective in achieving its mandate in a timely manner thereby unnecessarily prolonging the negative effects of disasters;

WHEREAS an unacceptable number of DRP files affecting thousands of Albertans still remain unresolved over 2 years after the 2013 flooding disaster in Southern Alberta;

WHEREAS an external examination and review of the DRP is required to assess recent program changes and to objectively recommend improvements that will enhance the effectiveness of the Program during and after a disaster;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association urge the Government of Alberta to employ external means including consultation with municipalities to identify and implement specific improvements to the DRP that will expedite the completion of outstanding files and will develop a more effective DRP delivery model able to efficiently meet the needs of Albertans affected by future disasters.

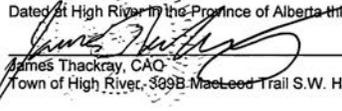
AUMA Annual General Meeting
September 2015

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Certified to be a true copy which has not been altered in any way of

The Town of High River's AUMA Extraordinary Resolution: Disaster Recovery Program ("DRP")

Dated at High River in the Province of Alberta this 15th day of September, 2015.


James Thackray, CAO
Town of High River, 309B MacLeod Trail S.W. High River, AB T1V 1Z5 (403) 652-2110

**AUMA Extraordinary Resolution:
Disaster Recovery Program (“DRP”)
Submitted by the Town of High River**

BACKGROUND

The Disaster Recovery Program (DRP) is designed to provide funding assistance to uninsurable property damage, loss and other expenses relating to a disaster. The intent of DRP is to help Albertans get back on their feet and regain financial security after suffering tremendous loss due to a disaster. This financial assistance is crucial in allowing grief stricken people the ability to focus on emotional and mental recovery so they can return to normal life. The collective benefits of an effective recovery to the province and the economy after a major disaster are immeasurable.

The flooding in Southern Alberta in June 2013 was the costliest natural disaster in Canadian history. The Government of Alberta has funded a significant portion of the response and recovery in various Southern Alberta communities through the DRP. The scale and impact of the flood overwhelmed the size and structure of the DRP. The Government of Alberta, through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, has made numerous changes to the service delivery model, the human resources and the various policies used to deliver the DRP. Despite these changes and a significant investment, an unacceptable amount of DRP files remain unresolved or subject to reconsideration leaving several thousand Albertans unable to put the disaster behind them.

The current DRP structure and service delivery model is not adequate to best serve the people of Alberta. Based on past challenges and current realities, changes to the Alberta DRP need to be identified and implemented to resolve the files associated with the 2013 flood. Further, these changes are absolutely necessary to better prepare the Program to respond to any disaster that the people of Alberta will face in the future.

The Town of High River has met with the past Premier and with various past Ministers of Municipal Affairs. Some suggestions have been implemented resulting in a measure of improvement but substantive change in the DRP is still needed.

After allowing for the formation of Cabinet, the Town initiated discussions with the new Minister and is attempting to engage the Premier on this urgent issue. Initial correspondence from the new government does not suggest a substantive evaluation will take place. The Government of Alberta recently informed the Town of High River that it is discontinuing KPMG’s engagement to externally review the DRP.

The newly elected provincial government is in a position to objectively evaluate the past performance and structure of the DRP and has the opportunity to improve the program, to complete files in process and to partner in the design of an improved Disaster Recovery Program to meet the needs of future generations of Albertans in times of disaster.

**AUMA Extraordinary Resolution:
Disaster Recovery Program (“DRP”)
Submitted by the Town of High River**

REFERENCES:

Attachment: DRP Statistics as at September 4, 2015

The attached slides present fairly some aspects of DRP’s processing of files, but are not detailed enough to paint the whole picture.

Proposed changes would modify the statistics to show that:

- Funding for home rebuilds may be at amounts that do not reflect constructions costs;
- Policy changes will require that previously “closed” applications will have to be reopened;
- Files shown as “Fully Funded” do not mean that applicants have received any or all of their eligible reimbursement;

Proposed changes could help rectify program weakness:

- Communication both internally (within GOA) and externally (with clients and partner agencies). Current state does not result in clear communication internally or externally (eg. a Town staff member (HIS Outreach Worker) was relaying new DRP policy changes to a DRP Case Manager who had not yet heard of them).
- Communication with clients; eligibility of expenses; what is funded and why. In the current system, communication with clients and eligibility of expenses is inconsistent and funding is not outlined.
- Definitions for all parts of the program. In the current program, words and definitions are used interchangeably and are not “hard and fast” (eg. “quote”, “receipt”, and “invoice” have all been used interchangeably and may or may not require proof of payment to be attached or not, depending on the Case Manager).
- Triage clients and identify those who are still at highest risk (eg. still out of their homes, dealing with structural and mould issues, etc.). Client files are currently dealt with on a first-come first-served basis, in whatever order seems appropriate to them.
- Quicker decisions and processing. Currently, the decision making and all aspect of the file processing is unnecessarily lengthy;
- Follow up and carry through on every commitment made to the clients in the time frame promised. At this time, deadlines and commitments are inconsistently adhered to.
- DRP staff should have manageable case loads. Currently, the average number of files per case manager is not manageable.
- Complete the implementation of a case manager model to ensure that one case manager is accountable and responsible for a file from its inception to its completion.