SECTION 4:
LOCAL MITIGATION PROGRAM COORDINATION

4.1 LOCAL CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT

OVERVIEW

The preparation of Local Hazard Mitigation Plans (LHMPs) is a precondition for receipt of Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant project funds under the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000), which also requires that states examine LHMPs as part of their State Hazard Mitigation Plan (SHMP) process. FEMA has established mitigation planning requirements for local jurisdictions to meet, among other things, to demonstrate that proposed mitigation actions are based on a sound planning process that accounts for the inherent risk and capabilities of the individual communities.

The Ohio EMA Mitigation Branch administers the LHMP Program for the state. The Mitigation Branch supports and assists local governments in the development and update of LHMPs. In early 2000's, a significant amount of federal and state funds were provided to develop LHMPs. For the time period spanning from the 2005 plan to the 2008 update, the main planning emphasis of the Mitigation Branch has been to get LHMPs reviewed, adopted, and FEMA approved. From 2008 to 2011, the emphasis shifted to tracking LHMPs progress and effectiveness in a quantitative way, and integrating plan information more significantly into the state plan. The focus during 2011-2018 was populating the State Hazard Analysis, Resource and Planning Portal (https://sharpp.dps.ohio.gov/ohiosharpp) with local plan information that enhances mitigation planning efforts statewide. In June of 2018, the Ohio EMA signed a Program Administration by State (PAS) Pilot Operational Agreement. This agreement allows the state to review and approve LHMPs and decrease the amount of time that LHMPs are in review.

Currently, Ohio has a very high LHMP participation rate. A county-by-county plan status report is included in Appendix D. As of December 2010, every county in the state of Ohio had developed a baseline mitigation plan that had been approved by FEMA. Based on an October 2018 report from FEMA, Region V 87.4% of the population of Ohio was situated in a community with a locally adopted, FEMA approved plan. As of October 2018, there are sixty-five county plans that are current and have final Federal approval. An additional two county plans (Franklin and Meigs) are federally approved pending adoption. Fifty-three counties are updating their plans under a federal grant, while six counties are developing their plans without a grant.

The Mitigation Branch has engaged in multiple outreach efforts to counties with expiring LHMPs to emphasize the importance of updating the plan, offer technical assistance, and identify possible funding sources for local mitigation plan updates. Fourteen LHMP updates were funded with PDM 16 funds, eighteen LHMP updates were funded with PDM 17 fund and nineteen plans will be funded under DR-4360. The Mitigation Branch will continue local mitigation plan outreach and technical assistance efforts during the next SOHMP update cycle.

SHARPP highlights local mitigation planning and project efforts. Providing greater public access to local mitigation plans will help publicize local strategies for reducing risk, and support requests for investment in mitigation projects. In addition to the benefits provided by SHARPP, the local mitigation planning capability has been enhanced by the Mitigation Branch's efforts to conduct statewide HAZUS version 4.2 runs for the 25- and 100-year recurrence intervals (see Section 2.2) and earthquakes. These HAZUS version 4.2 runs were made available to local officials for inclusion in LHMP updates. The Ohio EMA Mitigation Branch will continue to utilize HAZUS and promote the use of the tool throughout the state.

Local authority to implement a comprehensive hazard mitigation program is ample. Ultimately, it is up to each local jurisdiction to determine which mix of authorities, programs, policies, and capabilities it wants to develop. All Ohio communities (cities, villages, and counties) have the power to develop and adopt many different kinds of plans including comprehensive plans, capital improvement plans, economic development plans, emergency operations/response plans, continuity of operations plans, and hazard mitigation plans. Communities have regulatory powers to adopt zoning, subdivision, development, floodplain management and health codes. Ohio communities have the power to levy taxes / assessments for special purposes (including petition ditch projects, storm water utilities) and have the authority to borrow funds (bonding). Finally, communities have the authority to create planning, emergency management, health, public works, economic development and other needed agencies. All of these authorities have, or potentially could have, a bearing on local hazard mitigation.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF LHMPs

Because the Mitigation Branch has reviewed each LHMP, some trends were evident. Again, these trends are based on a qualitative, not quantitative review of the LHMPs.

OVERALL PLAN QUALITY

Overall, LHMPs involved many local agencies/entities and are of a good quality. It was noted that the quality of the plan is not dependent on its size; rather, it is the format and quality of information in the plan that is more important. Some of the best LHMPs are small to moderate sized. Ohio EMA recommends that jurisdictions use FEMA's planning how-to publications including the Local Mitigation Plan Review Guide, Local Mitigation Plan Review Tool, Mitigation Ideas: A Resource for Reducing Risk to Natural Hazards and the Local Mitigation Planning Handbook to guide the development of their plan.

One of the consistent issues across most, if not all, LHMPs is that the definitions used are not consistent. The areas where inconsistencies were most evident was in defining critical facilities, which seems to vary dependent on each jurisdiction's individual interpretation, building off of the definition within 44 CFR Part 201.6.

Another area of inconsistency was the way LHMPs conducted risk assessments and ranked the related hazard. There was a high level of variability in these processes, but variability in the risk assessment process and data sources used is not surprising given that communities have significantly different amounts and quality of data. In terms of ranking hazards, some LHMPs ranked the hazards based on a numerical ranking (using a matrix or scoring system), some developed a relative ranking system (one hazard ranked higher than another, but no number identified), and some developed a qualitative ranking system (ranking hazards as high, medium or low threat). However, flooding, severe summer storms, high winds/tornadoes, and severe winter storms were consistently ranked high or severe.

The final areas of inconsistency across the LHMPs is the manner in which hazards are grouped in the individual plans. Jurisdictions may choose to address each hazard separately or group similar hazards together, such as putting summer storms, hail and tornados together. The manner in which each hazard is addressed varies greatly depending upon the impacts to the local jurisdictions.

MITIGATION POLICIES, PROGRAMS & CAPABILITIES

Local mitigation policies and programs can be best understood by reviewing the local mitigation strategies. Those strategies should indicate whether policies or programs exist and need to be modified, or whether they exist at all. A few trends were noted.

It was evident that the majority of larger communities and counties have more extensive policies and programs in place versus smaller communities. Many of the local strategies pertaining to larger local governments tended to be geared towards refining or enhancing existing policies and programs versus creating them. The reverse was seen with smaller units of government. A similar trend was seen with local mitigation capability. Participants in the planning process for larger communities tended to be professional staff positions and/or multiple persons, while participants for smaller communities ranged from the mayor to council members to an appointed citizen.

Mitigation policies/programs/capabilities varied significantly from community to community and county to county. Some communities and counties had very sophisticated mitigation programs either demonstrated by the sophistication of their mitigation plans/goals/actions or the integration of mitigation programs. In addition, some communities developed their own, stand-alone plans. On the other end of the spectrum were communities that have virtually no involvement in hazard mitigation.

MITIGATION ACTIONS

While the mitigation actions in each LHMP can vary depending on the hazards and needs of each jurisdiction, there are several actions which occur in most if not all LHMPS. Education and outreach actions were the most frequently identified in LHMPs. Other actions that were frequently mentioned included flood mitigation projects (acquisitions/elevation, storm water), community and residential safe rooms, and warning systems (sirens/gages).