

# **Sturbridge Extreme Weather Events 2011**

**Mass. Municipal Association Annual Meeting**

**January 19, 2024**

**Shaun A. Suhoski, JD – Athol Town Manager  
(former Sturbridge Town Administrator)**

**Jean M. Bubon, AICP – Sturbridge Town Planner**



# Sturbridge Extreme Weather Events 2011

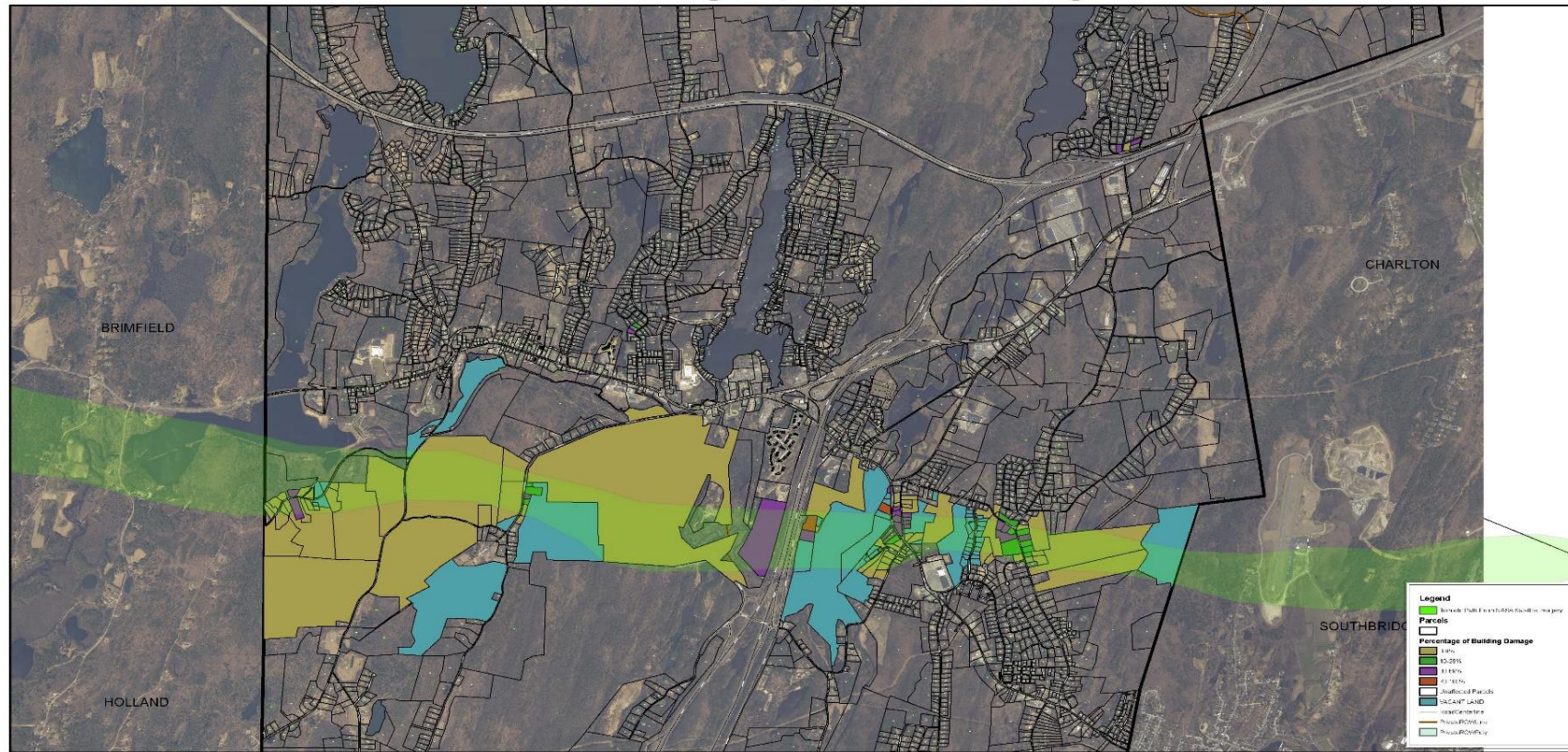
---

- 2011 was an extremely tumultuous and challenging year for Sturbridge
  - **Flooding** and **muddy conditions** greeted the spring as rain and substantial snow melt impacted multiple neighborhoods (recall the **severe winter storm** on January 11 and 12)
  - An **EF3 Tornado** ravaged a swath of town on a hot June afternoon near the end of a 39-mile track from Westfield to Charlton resulting in three fatalities and roughly 500 housing units condemned
    - *Note: the National Weather Service reported FOUR tornadoes on June 1, 2011. A second front spawned short-track EF1 tornadoes in Wilbraham and Brimfield and an EF0 tornado in Sturbridge.*
  - **Tropical Storm Irene** wreaked more havoc in August with flooding and road closures on state Route 20 and local streets
  - A surprise **October Nor'easter** with record snowfall left residents without power for up to eight days in some neighborhoods ("*trunk or treat*" starts)



# Tornado Path

Town of Sturbridge - 06/01/2011 Tornado Damage



This map was prepared for the Town of Sturbridge, Massachusetts, by the Massachusetts Office of Geographic Information. It is based on the most current data available. The Town of Sturbridge is not responsible for any errors or omissions. The map is provided for informational purposes only. It is not intended for use in any legal proceeding. The map is not a warranty, representation, or endorsement of any products or services. The map is not a guarantee of accuracy. The map is not a contract. The map is not a license. The map is not a franchise. The map is not a partnership. The map is not a joint venture. The map is not a consortium. The map is not a collaboration. The map is not a joint project. The map is not a joint effort. The map is not a joint undertaking. The map is not a joint operation. The map is not a joint activity. The map is not a joint venture. The map is not a joint project. The map is not a joint effort. The map is not a joint undertaking. The map is not a joint operation. The map is not a joint activity.





# June 1, 2011 EF3 Tornado

- **Damage and Debris: Route 131, Sturbridge Auto Body, Former Days Inn, Sturbridge; toppled school bus in Brimfield (courtesy Telegram & Gazette)**





# June 1, 2011 EF3 Tornado

- **Community Resolve: Fiske Hill Rd., Sturbridge Auto Body, Sturbridge; Village Green Campground, Brimfield (courtesy Telegram & Gazette)**



[Southbridge Resident Aftermath - Telegram & Gazette](#)





# Sturbridge Damages

---

- **149** Private Properties damaged
- **\$620,000** primary and secondary roads
- **\$2,800,000** other publicly accessed rights of ways, public facilities, recreation areas and trail networks
- **\$165,000.00** labor, overtime and equipment
- **Debris; Debris; Debris**





# Day 1 (night one)

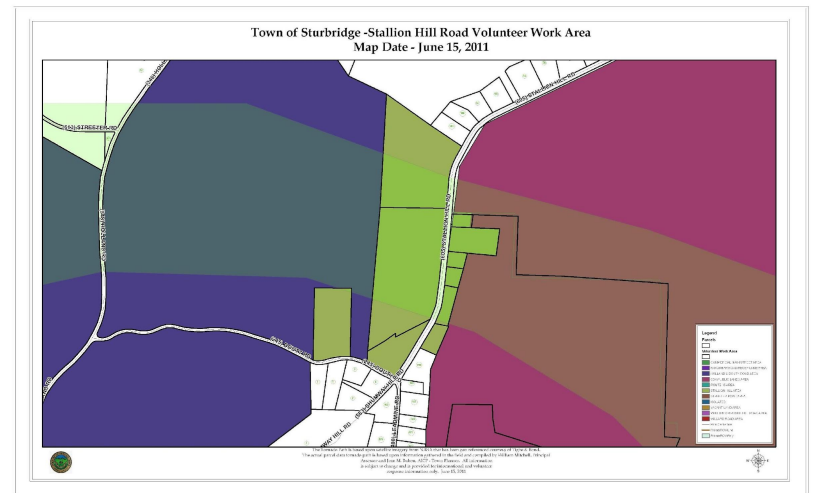
---

- Provide **emergency first-response** to all known impacted areas
- Town Administrator activates **Emergency Operations Center** (EOC) and establishes communication protocol
- Develop plan and timeline to reach **stranded neighborhoods** once safe (*eg. Streeter Road, Willard Road, etc.*)
- Determine best way to **communicate** to elected leadership, community-at-large and impacted neighborhoods (*eg. print and broadcast media, press briefings, local cable access, Web site, additional Select Board meetings, dispatch staff to directly-impacted neighborhoods*)

# Week 1

## GET ORGANIZED

- Obtain **satellite imagery** of tornado path from Army Corps;
- Digitize data to localize areas
- Town Planner creates maps of impacted areas to **organize assessment and cleanup**
- Town Administrator taps professional administrative staff to undertake **additional assessment and storm-recovery duties**





# Week 1(cont.)

## GET ACTIVE

- Building Inspector, Town Planner, Assessor, Fire Chief, MEMA **conduct site visits to photograph and document damages**
- Conservation Agent prepares report on **damage to public land**
- Select Board establishes **Volunteer Resource Center** led by citizen volunteer to mobilize substantial outpouring of help





# Weeks 2 and 3

- **Debris Management Plan** prepared by administrative staff reviewed and endorsed by Select Board
- **Fees** for building permits and dumping/demolition materials at local transfer station waived for owners of impacted properties
- Town staff engaged to provide assistance to residents in completing **FEMA-required paperwork including insurance claims**

(Sturbridge Auto Owners at FEMA Disaster Recovery Center. Image courtesy MassLive)





# Week 4 (and forever)

- **Debris management**, collection and (eventual) disposal (*eg. Curbside pick-up per management plan by defined zones in town; stockpile debris at vacant parcel on old Rt. 15*)
- Continued collaboration with **MEMA and FEMA** to ensure reporting protocols met for future reimbursement
- Continued **updates to Select Board and Finance Committee** on status of expenditures and reimbursement planning
- Reliance upon **Finance Director, finance staff and department heads** to ensure compilation of all eligible costs and timely submittal to MEMA and FEMA

**RINSE AND REPEAT:** Respond to surprise **October Nor'easter** with townwide woody debris, downed power lines and outages of up to eight days in remote neighborhoods; employ lessons learned from tornado response.





# Sturbridge Extreme Weather Events - Conclusions

---

- **"Extreme"** events are becoming **"the Norm"**
- **Pre-disaster planning** is essential
  - Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) is good local resource
  - Procure vendors before emergency happens (eg. debris management; transportation, etc.)
  - Conduct local or regional emergency management meetings and exercises; train staff in ICS / NIMS so they are prepared to assume additional support roles upon EOC activation; build contact and interoperability with regional jurisdictions and MEMA; ensure clarity as to decision-making ("who is in charge?")
  - Establish plan for communicating internally and externally; utilize Public Information Officer (PIO) so messages are clear and consistent to the target audience
    - Legacy print and broadcast media; utilize social media; Web site; push email and automated alert systems; community message boards; engage local elected leaders, department managers and staff to share key messaging as they are ambassadors of the community



# Sturbridge Extreme Weather Events

---

*Thank you!*

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Shaun A. Suhoski, Athol Town Manager ([ssuhoski@townofathol.org](mailto:ssuhoski@townofathol.org))

Jean M. Bubon, Sturbridge Town Planner ([jbubon@sturbridge.gov](mailto:jbubon@sturbridge.gov))