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# Planning for a Resilient Recovery Before a Disaster Strikes

## TRAINING TYPE

Peer-to-Peer Case Studies

## CONTACT

Tara Owens  
Bradley Romine

## SCALE

County  
Municipality

## LOCATION

Hawai'i

We'd love to hear from you.

*The Takeaway: Disaster recovery preparedness guidance.*

## Overview

Local governments are on the front lines of disaster recovery. It is their responsibility to both plan and manage all aspects of their community's recovery. This can place an enormous burden on local governments, especially planning and permitting, public works, and environmental services departments and agencies. However, many communities are not prepared for disaster recovery, particularly the rebuilding phase that can play out over many months. Learn which activities have been identified to help communities better prepare for their disaster recovery, and how recently developed guidance will help communities recover in a more resilient manner.

“Until recently, there has largely been attention devoted to the emergency management functions involved in the initial disaster response and clean-up. Our projects have attempted to look further ahead to provide a community basis, a planning framework, and tools for the rebuilding phases of recovery, to balance recovery speed with improved resilience to future disasters.”



**Tara Owens**

Coastal Processes and Hazards Specialist

University of Hawai'i Sea Grant Program

## Lessons Learned

- **Be patient and diligent.** Preparedness takes time. People don't change their behavior overnight. The outcomes of our work will continue to be a decade or more in the making and will be an iterative process—learning from experiences locally

and around the country. Communities and local governments are making progress on hazards preparedness, but they are balancing a lot of competing demands.

- **Understand local concerns.** Tara and Brad, along with their team and agency partners, took time initially to talk to various local stakeholders to better understand where guidance and protocols were needed. This created a richer resource that is applicable to local needs.
- **Have a local reconstruction ordinance and disaster recovery plan in place before a disaster strikes.** Brad shares, “In the past, we’ve had some reactive permitting following a disaster that led to shoreline hardening at the expense of coastal ecosystems. Having reconstruction plans and policies in place before a disaster occurs enables local governments to pause so they can consider pathways for resilient reconstruction.”
- **Local permitting staff and long-range planners are critical in disaster recovery planning.** It is imperative that they be at the forefront of disaster recovery preparedness while coordinating with emergency management agencies. Planners also need the tools to help them. This type of guidance can give permittees and long-range planners the resources they need to lead preparedness activities in a way that is efficient, improves community resilience, and protects the environment.

## The Process

Disaster recovery preparedness is about identifying a recovery management process—who makes what decisions and how those decisions are made. It also includes having processes and protocols in place for recovery and reconstruction actions. Many preparedness activities can be undertaken before a disaster event occurs. According to Bradley Romine, a Coastal Processes Specialist at the University of Hawai‘i Sea Grant College Program, “the more recovery issues that can be thought through in advance, the greater the efficiency and quality of post-disaster decision-making, which will then lead to more resilient community recovery.”

Tara Owens, a Coastal Processes and Hazards Specialist, works with Brad at the University of Hawai‘i Sea Grant College Program. Tara and Brad are working closely with county and state partners to help communities identify ways to reduce vulnerabilities and increase resilience to natural hazards. Like many coastal states, Hawaii is vulnerable to sea level rise and other coastal hazards.

Tara and Brad, along with state, county, federal, university, private sector, and community partners, developed the

Disaster Recovery Preparedness Guidance (<https://seagrant.soest.hawaii.edu/guidance-for-disaster-recovery-preparedness-in-hawaii/>)

. This guidance identifies activities and best practices for disaster recovery planning, and provides model resources, such as a reconstruction ordinance that would enable a community to identify and codify rebuilding priorities (i.e., which activities get streamlined versus which need review or community input).

### **Reconstruction Guidelines Project Paves Way for Recovery Guidance**

Tara serves as a liaison to the County of Maui Planning Department. This is a somewhat unique aspect of the Hawai'i Sea Grant program, where some staff, like Tara, sit in local government offices. This helps them better understand and engage in local issues.

Tara's involvement with preparedness planning started in 2012, when the Maui County Planning Department identified the need to be better prepared for episodic events, and realized communities will struggle with post-disaster reconstruction. Tara worked with Jim Buika, a Maui County coastal zone management planner with extensive background in emergency management, to explore post-disaster reconstruction guidelines and protocols. This project focused on balancing the need for speedy recovery and rebuilding, while ensuring cultural and sensitive natural resources were protected.

County-hosted workshops led by Tara and Jim, along with private sector partners, explored post-disaster reconstruction guidelines and protocols with homeowners, businesses, condominium and resort owners, and state and county agency practitioners. Community members discussed the current permitting and reconstruction process to identify ways to improve it.

To engage community members in a meaningful way, the project team developed a game board in the form of a matrix depicting damage impacts versus environmental sensitivity (e.g., hardened shoreline, wetland, stable cliff). This put community members in the shoes of a planner or permitter, with the charge to consider different scenarios and ultimately prioritize permitting procedures. For example, does the community rebuild a structure immediately? Is an inspection needed before a permit is issued, or does the community proceed with the normal permit procedure? Interestingly, feedback varied around the island depending on regional demographics, and these differences were carried through into the guidelines. Many participants left the community meetings acknowledging that post-disaster reconstruction guidelines and protocols are important, and balancing many needs is very difficult. This project resulted in several recommendations, including

- creating a one-stop-shop permitting system;
- providing more outreach and education on resilient construction practices;

- developing a deputized inspector program;
- engaging the Governor’s office regarding emergency proclamation and disaster declaration process and provisions; and
- expediting repairs, not reconstruction.

The team’s work laid the foundation for continuing work at the statewide level, ultimately leading to the development of the **Guidance for Disaster Recovery Preparedness** (<https://seagrant.soest.hawaii.edu/guidance-for-disaster-recovery-preparedness-in-hawaii/>)

. “The Maui County work started the conversations and highlighted the need for consistent guidelines on post-disaster reconstruction and recovery,” Tara shares.

### **Background on Guidance for Disaster Recovery Preparedness**

Hawai’i Sea Grant, in partnership with the State of Hawai’i Department of Land and Natural Resources and the State Office of Planning, applied to the NOAA Coastal Resilience Grants Program to enable statewide expansion. The goal was to create disaster recovery guidance and tools that all counties and relevant state offices in Hawai’i could use.

Through county and state meetings, webinars, and workshops, Brad and the project team received recommendations and input from a variety of stakeholders. The team also built upon several reports and recommendations, such as the “Maui County Reconstruction Protocols and Guidelines” report; disaster recovery frameworks and ordinances from other states; a Waikiki Pre-Disaster Recovery Planning Project; the FEMA “Pre-Disaster Recovery Planning Guide for Local Governments”; an American Planning Association model disaster recovery ordinance; and several other projects focused on disaster recovery preparedness.

### **Guidance Highlights**

This Disaster Recovery Preparedness Guidance was developed to help state and county planners

- Improve governance structure for recovery functions.
- Identify pathways to pursue critical disaster recovery preparedness activities to support resilient recovery and reconstruction.
- Encourage integration of disaster recovery preparedness efforts among related plans and policies.

“It’s focused on recovery with an eye toward resilience—balancing expediting reconstruction and rapid return to normalcy with building back safer, smarter, and more sustainable communities that are better able to absorb, recover from, and successfully adapt to future adverse events.”



**Bradley Romine**

Coastal Management and Resilience Specialist

University of Hawai'i Sea Grant Program

There are three recommended steps communities can take, depending on their needs, capacity, and the timing of disaster events.

- **Disaster recovery ordinance.** Provides legal authority for actions to expedite recovery, together with emergency powers protecting public health and safety, and fostering beneficial long-term recovery outcomes. It also authorizes the establishment of a recovery management organization and mandates the development of a disaster recovery framework.
- **Disaster recovery framework.** Guides recovery activities both before and after a disaster and explores options for restoration of critical community functions, services, vital resources, facilities, programs, and infrastructure. It establishes a framework for engaging relevant agencies and stakeholders and guides pre-disaster preparation.
- **Disaster reconstruction ordinance.** Establishes legal authority and decision-making protocols for expediting permitting for repairs and reconstruction on private property, while at the same time identifying and capturing critical opportunities for increasing community resilience to future disasters and protecting environmental resources. The ordinance is adopted before an event and establishes standard operating procedures for review and permitting for reconstruction of private property

after a disaster. An added bonus is that a community can get credit for developing such an ordinance under the Community Rating System (CRS) program.

## Outcome

The guidance was completed in early 2019, and Tara and Brad continue to work with county and state partners on hazards preparedness and recovery planning. This includes identifying opportunities to connect and integrate disaster recovery planning into existing plans, such as comprehensive plans and hazard mitigation plan updates, as well as emerging plans for climate action.

Being a partner and liaison to county and state agencies helps to connect the dots. For example, Tara is serving on the steering committee for Maui County's Hazards Mitigation Plan and supporting the planning department on long-range community plans. Similarly, Brad serves on a state hazard mitigation committee and works closely with the Hawai'i Climate Change Commission on Adaptation Planning. Tara continues to work with Maui County to implement recommendations that may lead to further development of a Maui-specific disaster rebuilding ordinance based on the Guidance for Disaster Recovery Preparedness.

"There are many conversations about this topic, and several existing and new county-led plans that consider coastal hazards," Tara shares. "It's a really exciting time to have a seat at the table to find ways to line up these plans and initiatives to improve our community's resilience to current and future hazards."

# Contributing Partners

Coastal Planners, LLC      State of Hawaii Office of Planning

Hawaii Sea Grant

State of Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources

Maui County, Hawaii      NOAA Office for Coastal Management

Planning Consultants Hawaii, LLC      Tetra Tech

## More Details

### Tools Used



- Community workshops

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### Funding



- Department of Land and Natural Resources Office of Conservation and Coastal Lands
- NOAA Office for Coastal Management Regional Coastal Resilience Grants Program

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## To Learn More



- Guidance for Disaster Recovery Preparedness in Hawai'i ([https://seagrant.content/uploads/2019/07/HI\\_Disaster\\_Recovery\\_Preparedness\\_Guidance](https://seagrant.content/uploads/2019/07/HI_Disaster_Recovery_Preparedness_Guidance))
- APA Disaster Recovery Resources (<https://www.planning.org/research/postdisaster/>)
- FEMA Pre-Disaster Recovery Planning Guide (<https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/pre-disaster-recovery-planning-guide-for-state-governments.pdf>)