
Flooding Task Force

Thursday September 18, 2025

Meeting Summary

Welcome

1:00 PM

Amy O'Leary, SEMCOG Executive Director, welcomed everyone to the meeting, and provided an overview of SEMCOG, its vision, and the role of a Task Force in developing regional plans. Director O'Leary discussed the flooding challenges the region has seen in recent years and why it's important to address flooding collectively. Director O'Leary shared that this task force will work to develop a plan that will position Southeast Michigan for funding and long-term success. To do this, the task force will:

- Review data and tools
- Identify nature-based and infrastructure projects and support implementation of these projects
- Shape policy recommendations
- Support public outreach and education

Introduction to the Task Force

1:05 PM

Task Force Co-Chairs Don Brown, Deputy Commissioner Macomb County Public Works and Tim Woolley, Mayor of Taylor, introduced themselves to the Task Force. The Task Force has over 80 dedicated professionals from across Southeast Michigan, making it one of the most collaborative and forward-thinking initiatives SEMCOG has launched. Elected officials, technical staff, state government agencies, nonprofits, academics, consultants, business and industrial representatives all make up members of the task force and will work together over the next year to shape this Flooding & Resilience Plan.

To kick the meeting off, Co-Chair Brown shared a video of a flooding event that took place in Chesterfield Township, where the streets of a neighborhood were flooded with water. Co-Chair Brown discussed the economic impacts of flooding on our communities, and the infrastructure investments we need to mitigate some of these challenges. He also stressed the importance of working together to address these challenges.

Co-Chair Woolley spoke about his personal experience with flooding, after he experienced basement flooding at his home. He discussed the challenges residents face when navigating insurance claims and the aftermath of flooding events. Co-Chair Woolley also shared what the City of Taylor is doing to build resilience, including frequent street sweepings to keep Sycamore leaves out of the storm drains and implementing green infrastructure that is designed to manage flooding.

Regional Partnerships & Collaboration

1:35 PM

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Amy O'Leary
Executive Director

Kelly Karll, SEMCOG Environment & Infrastructure Manager, set the stage for how flooding has impacted Southeast Michigan. She shared that there have been hundreds of millions of dollars in federal assistance with over 260,000 flooding-related Individual Assistance claims in Southeast Michigan since 2004. Not only is Southeast Michigan seeing an increase in the frequency and intensity of storm events, but much of Southeast Michigan's infrastructure is reaching the end of its useful life and isn't able to deliver the level of service needed to manage large storm events.

Kelly presented the results of the pre-meeting survey given to task force members. The Flooding Task Force survey revealed that 97% of communities experienced flooding in the last five years. Common impacts include basement backups, road closures, and infrastructure damage. While 77% are implementing green or nature-based solutions, only 14 communities rated their preparedness, with modest average scores.

Top needs identified by communities include:

- Data and tools for decision-making
- Planning and engineering guidance
- Emergency planning support

With all of this in mind, Kelly presented the Tree of Resilience, meant to illustrate a collaborative approach to flood mitigation. The tree showcases the partners and stakeholders that will lead this work

forward, the tools and data that will be used to make decisions, and the projects and initiatives that will help to build resilience in Southeast Michigan. This tree sets the stage for the work of the task force and drives a call to action from task force members.

Flooding & Resilience Plan Overview

1:45 PM

Katie Grantham, Planner III, SEMCOG Environment & Infrastructure, provided an overview of the Flooding & Resilience Plan that the task force will guide the development of. This Flooding & Resilience Plan will serve as a framework to mitigate flooding impacts across Southeast Michigan now and into the future and build resilience within local communities to respond to flooding events.

Tasks associated with the plan include:

- An update of SEMCOG's Flood Risk Tool, which includes adding additional hazards and assets to provide a larger picture of how flooding impacts Southeast Michigan's transportation network.
- Regional culvert data collection, that will help provide more accurate data to the Flood Risk Tool.
- A Regional Nature Based Solutions Analysis that identifies potential, feasible areas for project implementation. 4 concept plans will be developed, one per watershed (Huron, Clinton, Rouge, and Detroit River).
- A suite of projects across sectors that can reduce the impacts of flooding and reasonably be implemented. Projects identified within the Flooding and Resilience Plan are eligible for reduced match funding through Federal Highway's PROTECT Grant program and generally are more competitive for additional funding opportunities.
- Public outreach and engagement on resilience topics and project needs.

When asked what resilience means to task force members in one word, bounce back, withstand, preparation, sustainable, and proactive rose to the top.

Katie also asked what resources, other than funding, would help communities plan for and respond to flooding events. Data and tools for decision-making, planning and engineering guidelines, and outreach, education and awareness were some of the top answers.

Katie also shared the objectives of the Flooding Task Force, which include:

- Guide the development of the Flooding & Resilience Plan
- Provide feedback on nature-based solutions, conservation priorities, community flooding impacts and locations, infrastructure vulnerabilities and asset inventories and tools to support local decision-making.
- Establish a flooding collaboration framework with key messages for outreach and education for respective sectors on flooding vulnerabilities, community resiliency concerns, and opportunities for collaboration.
- Compile projects across transportation, environmental, water infrastructure, and private utility sectors that address flooding and stormwater infrastructure priorities with a collaborative framework for implementation success.
- Identify and prioritize regional policies and actions related to flooding and infrastructure resilience in the SEMCOG region.

Nature Based Solutions in Southeast Michigan

2:00 PM

Dan Christian, PE, TetraTech Senior Water Resource Engineer, provided the task force with an introduction to Nature Based Solutions (NbS). NbS work with natural processes to reduce flooding and provide multiple community benefits beyond flood control. Some of these co-benefits include avoiding flood damages and lower cost of recovery, enhance climate resilience, and safer, more resilient neighborhoods.

Dan asked the task force what factors should carry the most weight in selecting and designing NbS concepts. Task force members identified community & regional benefit and cost & long-term O&M as the top two factors to consider.

Dan also asked task force members which co-benefits of NbS projects matter most. Protection of property & infrastructure, improved water quality, recreation access, and health & equity outcomes as the top co-benefits.

Dan then shared examples of NbS from across the world, to get task force members thinking creatively about potential NbS practices that could be implemented in Southeast Michigan.

Following the presentation, task force members were asked what the top barriers to implementation are. Funding & cost-share, land acquisition/site control, and institutional silos & governance were identified as the top barriers. When asked about the top opportunities for advancing this work, cost-effectiveness evidence, multi-benefit framing, and new funding streams were identified as the top three opportunities.

Next, Nathan Zgnilec, Drummond Carpenter Project Manager, presented on the Nature Based Solutions Analysis, a task under the Flooding & Resilience Plan development. Nathan walked through the desktop planning assessment used to identify opportunities for large-scale NbS, and highlighted the role stakeholders played in narrowing down the list of sites across the region. This analysis identified over 700 potential sites, with 50 sites suggested by stakeholders. Work now is focused on narrowing down the list of sites.

Nathan then showed the Nature Based Solutions Dashboard, an online, interactive tool that allows the user to view high priority locations for NbS across the region and provide feedback on sites. Nathan shared what makes a good site, including the size of the NbS, the location within the watershed, the drainage potential, and overlap with stakeholder interest.

While this project only allows for four concept plans to be developed, all of the sites included in the dashboard have potential and should be considered by stakeholders as potential locations for NbS implementation to reduce flooding. For this project, the four conceptual plans will contain a narrative & design report, CAD layouts and cross section details, cost estimates, and renderings.

Following the NbS Analysis overview, Nathan asked task force members what design features of NbS would be valuable to their communities and organizations. Floodplain reconnection & off-channel storage, recreational amenities, and infiltration practices were listed as the top features.

Conclusion & Next Steps

2:50 PM

Prior to the next task force meeting, task force members are tasked with reviewing the [Nature Based Solutions Dashboard](#). Task force members should verify areas that are high priorities for implementation and identify areas that are missing from the dashboard. If task force members are interested in learning more about a site, or want to talk more with SEMCOG about priority locations, reach out to [Katie Grantham](#), Planner III, SEMCOG Environment & Infrastructure.

The next meeting of the Flooding Task Force is December 2, 2025, 1 – 3 P.M. Lunch will be provided before the meeting at 12:30. Registration for the meeting can be found [here](#).