

CITIZEN ADVISORY BOARD

HURRICANE AFTER ACTION REVIEW

Prepared for the
VENICE CITY COUNCIL

June 24, 2025

The City of Venice experienced the impacts of three hurricanes in rapid succession in August-October, 2024. The storms created wind and flooding that have never been seen here before, particularly in the coastal and low-lying areas. There was substantial property loss. Due in part to preparations by the city, there were no human casualties or serious injuries. However, in the aftermath of such destructive forces in such a short period of time and with the likelihood of future strong storms, the City must assess how they performed before and afterwards to meet resident needs. The City Council requested assessments in November 2024 from the City operations and residents' point of view: what did the City do well and what needs improvement in the future. The Assistant City Manager and Fire Chief presented a [Hurricane After Action Report](#) of City operations to the City Council on April 8, 2025. This Hurricane After Action Review (HAAR) has been developed by the Citizen's Advisory Board (CAB) on behalf of residents for review and action by City Council.

Task objectives: Identify what residents think the City of Venice did well and what should be improved in their preparations for future storms.

Approach: The CAB used a stepwise approach over 7 months to meet their task objectives (Table 1). The HAAR results are based largely on a survey of residents. The survey was sent out online from February 21 to March 14, 2025 to a broad cross-section of the city residents, businesses, and others who were affected by the storms to obtain their input about their experiences. CAB members were assigned "population segments" in the city to ensure that the survey addressed most people's experiences. The survey had 15 multiple-choice questions and 5 open-ended questions about respondents' demographics and experiences before, during and after the storms. Responses to multiple-choice question responses were summarized as percentages of respondents. The written responses to the open-ended questions were more subjective in nature and summarized by 2-3 CAB members to identify priority issues and recommendations for how to address these issues. Final recommendations to the City were developed by the CAB.

Table 1. Schedule of the Citizen Advisory Board to produce the Hurricane After Action Review (HAAR) for the Venice City Council.		
MEETING DATE	TASK	CAB ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT MEETING
November 20, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of the HAAR assignment to the CAB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop suggestions for approach to complete HAAR in 1 year
December 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign lead • Define HAAR objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft outline of HAAR report • Draft list of potential population segments • Draft questions for survey • Obtain hurricane related resources from the City and elsewhere
January 15, 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review draft outline of HAAR report • Create initial set of survey questions • Present the hurricane related resources • Assign population segments to CAB members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review hurricane related resources regarding information to be obtained in the survey from population segments • Revise survey questions for population segments • Identify how to reach population segments with the survey
January 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize questions for the survey • Finalize formats in which the survey will be distributed to population segments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create survey • Create database for compiling survey results
February 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise survey • Revise database • Approve survey for distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circulate survey • CAB members ensure that population segments are reached
March 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review preliminary results • Public meeting for resident input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete compilation of responses • Draft recommendations to answer concerns identified in the survey • Review City HAAR
April 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compile responses and recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft final report
May 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve final report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
June 10 (City Council Meeting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present final report to City Council at their meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

Survey Results:

A total of 880 responses were received to the 2024 Hurricane Survey. Respondents represented all the population segments except for “Student”. The [preliminary survey results](#) were presented at the CAB March 19 meeting ([Video of presentation](#) from minute15:45-36:12). The summary of the multiple-choice questions is included with this report as Addendum 1. The summary of the open-ended questions is included with this report as Addendum 2.

The rest of this report is the answer from the CAB to the City Council about what the City did well and recommendations for what needs improvement in future storms.

What the City did well

Nearly 75% of people who responded to our survey were Very Satisfied or Satisfied with how the City of Venice responded to the hurricanes. This level of satisfaction is a testament to the effective level of service provided by the City for its residents. Many residents had damage from wind or flooding, but there was no loss of life in two back-to-back hurricanes of record. The City’s dedication to protecting safety, life, and property is based on a very complex operation that requires long-term planning and coordination of myriad resources.

A sign of a good plan that is well implemented is the lack of credit that there is a plan in action. Residents enjoyed benefits they did not often mention in the survey from how well the City implemented the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and other plans. This allowed residents to take care of our own needs safely. Survey respondents did not acknowledge, for example, the building codes that prevented untold amounts of damage from wind and flooding. Information was widely available before the storms about how to prepare and the storms’ status. People were rescued from floods (from which they should have evacuated) and taken to safety by the emergency responders who were well trained and had the equipment they needed for successful rescues. There were no reports of looting following the storms because of an effective police presence. The water and sewer services were turned back on in a matter of hours because the infrastructure was protected by proactive management. Roads were quickly cleared with equipment that had been strategically staged before the storm and made safe for residents returning to their homes. The list goes on. Given the magnitude of the storms and potential widespread destruction, the City could have sustained much worse damage. The City did many things very well to avoid many costly and dangerous conditions for residents.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the City’s response to the hurricanes is the dedication of its’ employees. Anyone hired by the City is considered essential personnel in preparing for, enduring, and recovering from hurricanes. This includes staff members from city hall, public works, engineering, utilities, airport, information technology, and all other departments. Everyone is expected to return to work when the storm subsides and perform tasks that may be well beyond their normal duties. These are the people who answered the phones in City Hall when we had questions, plowed blockages away for drainage, assessed damage to apply for state and federal assistance, tracked contractors to remove the debris piles, and much more. Many staff stayed at

the Emergency Operation Center where they coordinated operations before, during and following the storms. All staff left their families and homes to aid City residents during an extremely difficult time. These people are to be commended. However, they are not alone. Many volunteers and community members were ready to pitch in to do whatever needed to be done to help their friends, neighbors, and fellow Venetians. As expressed in the City Hurricane After Action Report, the CAB extends our sincere appreciation to the countless community members, public safety professionals, emergency management personnel, City staff members, and volunteers from Florida and across the nation who contributed to these hurricane response and recovery efforts.

Recommendations for what needs improvement in future storms:

Our recommendations were developed in response to the charge from the City Council to help improve operations in future storms. The 41 recommendations below address 10 problem areas that were identified in the survey and from other sources. Many issues raised in the survey were about services and jurisdictions beyond the City's direct control. We chose to include recommendations that go beyond the "wingspan" of the City to ask for the City's involvement on behalf of residents with other governmental entities, businesses, and organizations. Some recommendations are based on incomplete knowledge by survey respondents about what the city does or were from a different perspective from the City's about what occurred. We chose to include these as an opportunity for the City to explain to residents why things were handled as they were. The City may also benefit from hearing from residents about the unintended consequences they experienced due to various decisions made by the City. We made every effort to present a complete set of recommendations from City of Venice residents, businesses, and visitors about their experiences in the 2024 Hurricane Season. We hope these recommendations are useful and result in even smoother operations in future storms.

1. **Communications** – Messaging from the City about storm preparations, evacuations, status of the storms and conditions in Venice were good, but often did not reach the residents. People who were able to access social media and the City website were impressed with how complete the information was. However, those without power, phones, or internet had trouble finding necessary information. Information from the most used outlets (i.e., county text alert, television, and weather apps) was often not specific to Venice, reported on events rather than providing public service announcements, and/or not very helpful in determining when people could return after the storms. In addition, the City Hurricane Expo was not used by many people.

- a. Develop a plan for widespread distribution of information to post in homes when utilities are down with city service contact information and media outlets where storm updates will be broadcast. Media outlets (e.g., local radio stations) need to be available during power, internet, or phone service outages.

- b. Provide police and emergency staff with information cards to give out on request when meeting residents who still need information.
- c. Broaden communication during outages through the use of battery radios.
- d. Collaborate with local radio stations to provide public service announcements on the storm status.
- e. Include a page in the Hurricane Guide explaining how to get information before, during and after the storms when power, phone, and internet services are not available.
- f. Keep communications going during the recovery period. Provide information on the recovery process such as when water is potable, where ice is available, resources at the community center, safety at beaches/parks; and schedule priorities for debris removal.

2. **Sandbag distribution** – Many residents were not able to get sandbags in a timely fashion. The bags were distributed at a different location from where they were filled with sand. Bags were slowly filled by hand. The sand station was closed the weekend prior to Milton. Sand was available at only one location, so long lines of cars formed that often took hours to reach the fill station. Volunteers could have been used more effectively to cover when city staff was not available. The whole process was late in starting up before the storms and too slow to meet the demand.

- a. Have filled sandbags available earlier in the season.
- b. Have sandbags and sand available at the same site.
- c. Either open more than one site or purchase a sand bag filling machine.
- d. Organize volunteers early in the hurricane season.
- e. Consult with Sarasota County and other jurisdictions for how to learn from their process to make ours more efficient.

3. **Evacuation** – Mandatory evacuation notices were issued during Hurricanes Helene and Milton. While most people seemed to be able to evacuate in a timely manner and not have undo problems, many residents did not evacuate. Many felt safe in their homes and did not want to go to the trouble or cost of evacuating. People who were not able to access online maps to find their evacuation level were frustrated with the poor quality of small, printed maps (e.g., in the newspaper and Hurricane Guide). There is confusion about the difference between floodplain zones and evacuation levels. As evacuation orders for Level C were issued later for Hurricane Milton, evacuation for some residents was complicated by already crowded highways, lack of hotel rooms, and shortages of gasoline. Some residents said that they would not evacuate again. This poses a problem for the City as emergency personnel may be put at risk with avoidable rescues during storms had evacuation notices been followed.

- a. Make larger, clearer, printed evacuation level maps available.
- b. Identify parking areas where residents can leave cars.
- c. Communicate the availability of evacuation centers including whether they take pets and can handle people with special needs.
- d. If evacuation centers were full for Hurricanes Helene and/or Milton, collaborate with Sarasota County to establish a center closer to or in Venice.
- e. Work with Sarasota County and the Florida Department of Transportation to identify ways to reduce congestion on evacuation routes.

4. **Debris removal** – Tremendous amounts of debris were generated during Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Ruined furniture, appliances, building materials, and other household items were stacked with large piles of yard debris along curbs throughout the city. It was unsafe and unsightly. It turned out to be flying projectiles with Hurricane Milton less than two weeks following Hurricane Helene. Residents felt that it should have been collected more quickly. They did not understand the priorities of the contractors for which areas and when the debris would be removed. Residents asked for ways to remove the waste themselves.

- a. Communicate the priorities and scheduling of the debris removal contractors throughout the debris removal process.
- b. Investigate the availability of dumpsters to be provided around the city for residents to deposit their debris, especially in hardest hit areas.
- c. Encourage the county to open landfills so residents can haul their own household and yard debris.
- d. Educate the public about proper placement and separation of debris to facilitate an efficient debris removal process.

5. **Drainage** – Several areas in the City had damaging floods during the storms. Areas along Curry Creek, Hatchet Creek, creeks on the island and other low-lying areas flooded from rainfall that could not drain readily. Drainage was slowed by blocked channels and high water levels in receiving waters. Coastal areas flooded from a combination of rainfall, high tide, and storm surge. Damage from coastal flooding was compounded by the storm surge carrying sand into homes along the beach strand. Golden Beach, a naturally low-lying area, was hard hit in particular by flooding from the storm surge when Flamingo Ditch could not drain to the Gulf. Residents in flooded areas experienced damage ranging from loss of landscaping to having to demolish and rebuild their homes.

- a. Conduct studies on watersheds that experienced flood damage to structures to identify areas that need better drainage then implement drainage improvement measures.

- b. Expedite the Flamingo Ditch study to identify and implement flood management measures as soon as possible in the 2025 hurricane season.
- c. Prioritize maintaining clear drainages in the Flamingo Ditch watershed and elsewhere before storms hit to minimize the need to clear drainages immediately after the storms.

6. **Barriers to repairs and rebuilding** – Problems with the permitting process was one of the most common survey responses. Residents found the permitting process to be confusing, staff did not provide clear guidance on the steps to obtain a permit, and navigating the 50/50 Rule was frustrating. Residents also felt that the City was unable to handle the volume of permits after the storm (some are still trying in April 2025 to get a permit for repairs) and felt that some minor repairs should not warrant a permit. Residents were frustrated with being told to visit a website for information when internet and phone service was unavailable.

Resident suggestions on how the process could be improved included updating and clarifying verbiage used in the letters sent to property owners, having hardcopy informational permitting packets available, additional staff after storm events, better training of staff, expedited permit reviews for minor repairs, and reduced fees or no fees from storm related permits.

Claims made with regards to individuals trying to obtain permits include that the City completely “shut down” permitting and that individuals were being asked to obtain permits for work that would not normally require a permit and questioned why the City was not following in Sarasota County’s footsteps with regards to expedited reviews and waived/reduced fees (the City did waive fees as allowable by state statute on October 24, 2024).

- a. Ensure the permitting process documents and forms are clear, reader friendly (especially for first time users) and readily available during power outages. Include the timeline of the permitting process, list of documents/items required for submitting a permit (e.g., survey, engineering plans, forms, cost estimates, etc.), and a simple explanation of the 50/50 Rule.
- b. Consider developing a special post hurricane permitting process for those residents impacted by the hurricane. This could include the removal of barriers for minor repairs (e.g., information requirements, fees, engineer drawings, denying change from pre-storm materials).
- c. Develop an efficient in-person permitting process to address a possible flood of applicants.
- d. Consider including the permitting process as part of the Hurricane Expo or conduct a special one hour session on the topic; consider developing a short video on the process, placing it on the city’s website or You Tube.

7. **Meeting special needs** – Senior and disabled residents need assistance preparing their homes for the storms, evacuating, and recovering from the storms. They are limited in doing heavy physical activity preparing their homes, bearing the costs of stocking up food and other

supplies for the storms, keeping medical equipment functional during outages, and staying in contact with their medical providers. Many residents are not able access texts or online resources for information about the storms. Residents of assisted living facilities, especially those in memory care, often do not understand what is expected of them during the storms.

- a. Distribute information (see Recommendation 1.a above).
- b. Ensure that special needs and medically dependent residents are on the city registry for police and emergency services.
- c. Help HOA's, religious institutions, and volunteer organizations identify residents with special needs and check on their needs before, during, and after the storms.

8. **Volunteers** – Many important tasks were performed by volunteers before, during and after the storms. Volunteers filled sandbags, helped residents with special needs, cleaned up yards and parks, cleared out flood-damaged homes, hauled debris to piles for pick up and provided other physical and compassion services. And there are many other services (e.g., phone banks, information desk, etc.) that volunteers could provide to the City to reduce the load on over-extended city employees. Residents have expertise that would be valuable in organizing the many residents who already volunteer or are prepared to volunteer. A large pool of volunteers is available to help.

- a. Provide a volunteer coordinator.
- b. Facilitate the formation of a hurricane volunteer committee that would plan and organize help before, during, and after the storms.
- c. Develop a hurricane volunteer action plan. The plan should address as broad of a scope of issues and people affected by the hurricanes as possible. This includes helping those who need temporary accommodations while their homes are repaired, helping the unhoused who need facilities where they can recover from loss and damage to their belongings, and managing sources of pollution in our waterways.
- d. Provide a central location for hurricane volunteers to use as a base of operations and where residents can come to find volunteer opportunities.

9. **Centralized Hurricane Resource Location** – Residents often referred in the survey to not knowing where to go for hurricane information and other resources. Before the storms, for example, clear printed maps of evacuation levels were needed by residents who could not access online maps. Residents with special needs need help with heavy, physical tasks to prepare for the storms. They may also need to be placed on a registry for police to check on them after the storm. After the storm abates and services are still out, residents need to charge phones and access internet connections. Florida, Power and Light and the phone and internet providers need to answer questions about outages. Residents do not know where to go to volunteer. There

were many questions about the debris removal process. In times of such frustration and uncertainty, a safe place to take a break is necessary. Some residents would like to get together over a cup of coffee and a donut to commiserate and support each other. Other residents who lost property or possessions need even more support.

- a. Dedicate space in a central location to act as a place where residents know where to go for hurricane related resources before, during and after storms and that can serve as a deployment site for the various services described above as appropriate.
- b. Work with the Hurricane Volunteer Committee before the storm to provide staffing for various services.

10. **Tourism** - Following recent hurricane recovery efforts in Sarasota County, Visit Sarasota conducted a community impact review to assess visitor and resident perceptions, economic impacts, and potential strategies for future response via Downs & St. Germain Research. The findings below reflect both quantitative and qualitative data collected from current and potential visitors

- Of the visitors present in Sarasota County in early 2025 for the County assessment, 95% were aware of hurricane recovery efforts during their stay. While 21% reported a negative impact on their trip, only 5% stated their perception of Sarasota County as a tourist destination was negatively affected. Two percent of surveyed “potential visitors” stated they would not visit Sarasota County within the next six months due to hurricane-related concerns. However, 1 in 6 believe that leisure visitation could be affected by perceived damage or recovery activity.
- Visitors spent a total of \$2,548,391,500 in Sarasota County on accommodations, dining, transportation, attractions, shopping, and more in FY 2024 (2% decrease from FY 2023). Their total economic impact was \$4,026,458,600 in FY 2024 (5.9% decrease compared to FY 2023). This generated \$48,133,858 in Tourism Development Tax collected in FY 2024 (4.7% decrease from the FY 2023 record of \$50,478,806; Note: Despite the decline, FY 2024 TDT revenue remains higher than figures from FY 2020, 2021, and 2022). This supported 24,100 jobs in the county and saved \$746 per household annually.

The Visit Sarasota survey highlighted the importance of clear, consistent public messaging about recovery status and visitor readiness.

- a. Consider implementing a storm recovery status dashboard on official tourism sites and social media content that shows active recovery and returning normalcy.
- b. Enhance partnerships with Sarasota County and State of Florida to promote safe travel and community strength.
- c. Integrate real-time recovery updates into tourism marketing channels (business websites, chamber of commerce, Facebook, etc.).
- d. Continue monitoring visitor feedback to adapt communication and efforts to return visitors to the Venice community in years ahead.
- e. Involve citizens and those directly engaged in the tourism business here in Venice.

CONCLUSIONS

After a 7-month inquiry into the performance of the City of Venice during the 2024 Hurricane Season, the Citizen's Advisory Board found that the city did very well and had many things to be proud of. The City deserves credit for preparing residents, assets, and operations to avoid many problems, minimize damage, and quickly recover most areas of the City. It was a feat of determination to pivot from storm recovery from Hurricane Helene to storm preparation for Hurricane Milton in less than two weeks. There were many successes. We appreciate the planning, dedication, and sacrifice it took to get our City through the unprecedented 2024 Hurricane Season in such good shape. However, as expected in such a large, complex operation, we identified several problems that need to be addressed. We offer the recommendations in this review to improve outcomes for future storms.

EPILOGUE

While developing the Hurricane After Action Review for the City Council, the Citizens' Advisory Board was made aware of more areas for improvement than just what the City could do. Many city residents had unreasonable expectations for what could or should have been done for them – especially following the storms. The recommendations in this report are intended to help improve how the City responds to future storms. However, we felt it advisable to include recommendations for residents to take more personal responsibility for the safety of their families, homes, and neighbors. There is only so much we can expect the City to do for us during hurricanes. Each of us needs to take time to reflect on what we, individually and as members of neighborhoods, condominiums, and HOA's can do to properly prepare for future storms before they are on our beaches and doorsteps. Just as we recognize that the city will always have room for improvement, we should strive to do the same.

We have created below a list of suggestions to consider.

- 1) Individually prepare now - at the BEGINNING of hurricane season.
 - a. Gather information about preparing for hurricanes, including attending the Hurricane Expo and reading the Hurricane Guide.
 - b. Prepare your home, car, yards, boats and other vulnerable possessions. For example,
 - i. Check and replace old batteries that are in your storm supply.
 - ii. Stockpile bottled water.
 - iii. Stockpile non-perishable food.
 - iv. Procure sufficient filled sandbags (protect from the sun for long storage life).

- v. Periodically start/run chainsaws, generators, etc. to make sure that they are in peak condition.
 - vi. Safely maintain fresh fuel and supplies for the equipment noted above.
 - c. Develop an evacuation plan,
 - i. Identify alternate routes and lodging depending on the storm path.
 - ii. Make a list of evacuation items to facilitate packing.
 - iii. Keep your evacuation vehicle serviced and the tank topped off regularly.
 - d. If you are technically challenged, find help to understand how to access important storm updates and other information on your phone or the computer.
- 2) Develop plans corporately for your neighborhood, condo and/or HOA
- a. Have informal driveway discussions of storm plans.
 - b. Check and clear area drains and culverts before and after the storm.
 - c. Create a list of which neighbors have tools such as chainsaws that can be shared post storm.
 - d. Exchange contact information.
 - e. Identify your neighbors that may require extra assistance before, during and after a storm.
 - f. Develop a plan to check on those neighbors listed above.
 - g. Appoint a liaison to the city for your neighborhood, condo or HOA to facilitate efficient communication.

ADDENDA

1. 2024 Hurricane Survey Results_Part 1 – Summary of multiple-choice survey questions
2. 2024 Hurricane Survey Results_Part 2 – Summary of 5 open-ended survey questions