

Virginia Commonwealth Flooding Board

Virginia needs a new entity to direct and prioritize state and federal funding for flood mitigation, ensure collaboration and alignment among State agencies, and coordinate planning and adaptation efforts. . In the Commonwealth, flooding is caused by three sources, which sometimes occur simultaneously: precipitation, wind, and tides. Flooding impacts all regions of Virginia including those with upland, riverine, and coastal environments. Each of these drivers appears to be getting worse as a result of changing climatic conditions. Extreme rainfall events repeatedly have caused riverine and inland flooding and have also intensified coastal flooding. Coastal areas are also experiencing the impacts of sea level rise. Increased sea level means regular high tide events result in more flooded roads and properties and storm events impact larger portions of coastal communities. There is a need to define the scope of these problems, design solutions, and invest in mitigation.

The General Assembly should create a Commonwealth Flooding Board (CFB) to be an oversight body to coordinate flood mitigation efforts at the State level. The CFB would be similar to the existing Commonwealth Transportation Board, which meets on a regular basis to address critical transportation needs and issues in Virginia. The CFB would be responsible for performing the same function for statewide flooding issues and should address the following:

- provide a statewide forum for the discussion of flood mitigation and coordination among state agencies and regions in efforts to address this critical challenge.
- approve a prioritized list of projects to be funded by the Community Flood Preparedness Fund,
- approve a prioritized list of proposed investigations to be conducted by the US Army Corps of Engineering Civil Works program
- oversee the implementation and updating of the Coastal Resiliency Master Plan at least every 5 years
- annually evaluate the alignment of the following state programs and associated grants and loans with the Commonwealth’s flood mitigation objectives

VDOT six-year improvement program	VEDP Brownfields
VDOT long-range transportation plan	VDEM Building Resilient Infrastructure in Communities
DCR Dam Safety, Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund	VDEM Hazard Mitigation Plans and Grants
DEQ Water Quality Improvement Fund	VDH Clean Water Revolving Fund
DHCD Community Block Development Grants	VDH Drinking Water Revolving Fund

Virginia currently receives federal funding to multiple state agencies that could be applied to planning and mitigation efforts. The state hasn’t developed priorities to guide the use of federal funding to address flooding. Each agency administers their programs without coordination with other State agencies. Often programs that could be used for flood mitigation and adaptation are used for other



purposes because flooding isn't a particular agency's primary or traditional mission. For example, VDOT isn't focused on rebuilding or replacing roads that flood. VEDP isn't focused on reusing brownfields to mitigate flooding or to address remediation needs in flood-prone areas. DCHD isn't focused on reducing the impacts of flooding on communities. All of these agencies and more have programs with federal funding that could support a coordinated state plan to reduce the impacts of flooding. Virginia needs a plan and a Commonwealth Flooding Board to keep track of all of these opportunities and to make sure the Commonwealth works strategically and comprehensively to mitigate flood risks.

Another significant source of federal funding is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Civil Works program. The Water Resources Development Act authorizes the USACE to conduct investigations of specific water problems throughout the nation. Some of these authorized projects are implemented each year in accordance with the USACE's annual work program. Virginia needs to develop a prioritized list of investigations to position itself to compete with other states. The Commonwealth will not be eligible for the billions in federal construction funds that are spent under the USACE Civil Works program unless Virginia is first included in the authorizations and appropriations for new investigations and is able to get those projects included in the work program.

In addition to federally funded programs, there will be new state funds dedicated to flood mitigation. In 2020, House Bill 22 created the Community Flood Preparedness Fund. The fund will make loans and grants available to localities for coastal and riverine flood prevention and mitigation projects. Based on HB 981, proceeds from Virginia's participation in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) will be allocated to the Community Flood Preparedness Fund. DEQ estimates that roughly \$50M/year of RGGI revenue would be allocated to the Community Flood Preparedness Fund and over \$3M/year would be available for administration and climate change planning.

The proposed Commonwealth Flooding Board would be comprised of 10 citizens appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the General Assembly and the director of the new Commonwealth Flooding Department. Appointments shall be staggered to provide stability and long-range planning beyond the tenure of any single governor. Ex officio members would include the Secretary of Natural Resources, Secretary of Transportation, Secretary of Public Safety, and Secretary of Commerce.

The Board would be supported by a new Commonwealth Flooding Department (CFD). The Board would direct the CFD's work program to include data collection, planning, research, analysis, modeling, and project management. CFD could also serve as the nonfederal sponsor for USACE Civil Works projects. The CFD would include the Director plus a minimum of eight staff with combined expertise in floodplain management, stormwater modeling, civil engineering, coastal engineering, geology, nature-based green infrastructure, land use planning, economics, benefit-cost modeling, environmental policy development, environmental justice, and financial management (grant management, bond ratings, investment strategies). The CFD would be funded by the estimated \$3M/year in RGGI auction proceeds identified for administration and climate change planning and mitigation activities.

