

TOWN OF LOXAHATCHEE GROVES
155 F Road Loxahatchee Groves, FL 33470



MEMORANDUM

TO: TOWN COUNCIL

THROUGH: FRANCINE L. RAMAGLIA, CPA, AICP, ICMA-CM, TOWN MANAGER

FROM: VALERIE OAKES, CMC, TOWN CLERK

DATE: OCTOBER 18, 2024

SUBJECT: OFFICE OF THE TOWN CLERK/EOC PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER HURRICANE MILTON RESPONSE AND COMMUNICATION SUMMARY

Overview

In response to Hurricane Milton and the associated tornado activity, the Office of the Town Clerk/Public Information Office, in collaboration with the Emergency Management Director at the direction of Town Manager Ramaglia, was instrumental in providing real-time updates, coordinating volunteer efforts, and managing critical resources throughout the event. The storm's impact was exacerbated by multiple tornadoes that struck simultaneously as Hurricane Milton made landfall, causing significant damage to homes and infrastructure. This report outlines the key actions taken to ensure the safety of residents and support the community's recovery process.

Our office initiated ongoing communications starting Tuesday morning and continued through the post-storm period, ensuring that residents were consistently informed. Below is a detailed account of the efforts undertaken by the Office of the Town Clerk/Public Information Office.

Pre-Storm and Ongoing Communication Efforts

On **Tuesday, October 10th, at 9:00 A.M.**, the Public Information Office began posting crucial updates to the Town's social media platforms and website. The goal was to keep residents aware of the storm's progress and provide guidance on preparation and safety measures. Key updates included:

- **Hurricane Milton Update #1:** The first storm alert was issued, encouraging residents to prepare by securing property and gathering emergency supplies.

- **Hurricane Milton Update #2:** Continued preparation advice and included emergency contact numbers for local shelters and services.
- **Hurricane Milton Update #3:** Detailed the rainfall forecast and announced adjustments to solid waste collection services in anticipation of the storm.
- **Hurricane Milton Update #4:** Informed the public of the Town Hall closure and provided information on how residents could access emergency resources while Town services were suspended.
- **Hurricane Milton Update #5:** Shared the final pre-landfall storm updates, including shelter locations and safety measures.
- **Hurricane Milton Update #6:** Shared the final landfall storm updates, including shelter locations and safety measures.

Creation of the Emergency Management Webpage

One of the key actions taken before and during the storm was the creation of a dedicated **Emergency Management webpage** on the Town's website. This page served as a central hub for critical information, providing residents with:

- Emergency shelter locations.
- Updated contact information for emergency services.
- A list of safety tips and resources for both the storm and post-storm recovery.

This webpage was continually updated to reflect the changing conditions and provide essential resources as the situation evolved.

Additionally, a **Tornado Watch News Release** was issued while the hurricane was still active. This release included important updates about the potential for tornadoes, reinforcing the need for immediate precautions as the storm progressed.

As Hurricane Milton made landfall, several tornadoes developed, causing extensive damage to homes across the area. The simultaneous occurrence of tornadoes during the hurricane's peak resulted in the most significant damage to residential structures. In response, our office provided real-time updates about the tornado warnings, reinforcing the need for residents to take shelter and remain alert during this dual threat.

Community Engagement and Post-Storm Resource Coordination

Following the hurricane and tornadoes, the Office of the Town Clerk shifted focus to recovery efforts, including community engagement and resource coordination.

- **Neighbors Helping Neighbors Initiative (Post-Storm):** In the aftermath of the storm, we launched the **Neighbors Helping Neighbors** program, encouraging residents to assist one another in debris removal and storm recovery. A flyer was created and distributed to foster this community-led effort.

- Two volunteer meetings were held at Town Hall with the **Neighbors Helping Neighbors** group, coordinating efforts for debris and vegetation clean-up across the most heavily impacted areas.
- **Hurricane Shelter Locations Flyer:** A flyer detailing shelter locations was distributed, ensuring that residents had access to the nearest safe spaces for evacuation.
- **Post-Storm Support and Recovery Resources:** The Town Clerk's Office also compiled a comprehensive resource list, which included:
 - Information on bulk debris collection schedules.
 - Links to state and federal assistance programs such as FEMA and SBA.
 - Contacts for local recovery services and disaster relief agencies.

Additionally, the **Town Council's regular meeting was rescheduled, and the ULDC Committee Meeting** was postponed due to the storm's aftermath. This postponement was communicated promptly to the elected officials, committee members, and the public.

Post-Storm Communication and Recovery Coordination

Once the storm had passed, our focus turned to ensuring that residents had clear information on the recovery process. The Town Clerk's Office provided continuous updates on social media and the Town website, offering guidance on waste collection services, post-storm safety, and available recovery assistance. Key post-storm actions included:

- **Bulk Debris Collection Notice:** Coastal Waste Services was enlisted to help manage debris collection, and regular updates were provided to residents regarding collection schedules and protocols.
- **Tornado Alert and Recovery Press Releases:** In response to the tornado damage, we issued additional press releases informing residents about safety precautions and resources for recovering from the storm's devastation.

We also created a dedicated **Recovery Assistance Resources Page**, which provided essential links and contact information for ongoing support efforts. This page included information about programs such as:

- **211 Helpline** for Palm Beach and the Treasure Coast.
- **United Way Disaster Response.**
- **Florida Disaster Recovery** services.

Our team has continued to provide up-to-the-minute updates via the Town's website and social media platforms to keep residents informed and supported during this challenging recovery phase.

Conclusion

The Office of the Town Clerk/Public Information Office has been actively engaged in both the immediate response and long-term recovery efforts following Hurricane Milton and the associated tornadoes. Through timely communications, effective coordination of resources, and fostering community involvement, we have ensured that the Town of Loxahatchee Groves remained resilient in the face of disaster. Our ongoing efforts continue to focus on supporting residents as they rebuild and recover.