

Boston Bulletin: Federal Cuts to Disaster Prevention Aid Hit Boston

By Ariane Komyati

In April, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced that the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program (BRIC) was ending. Governor Healey publicly criticized the Trump Administration's cancellation of this grant program, which provided disaster prevention aid in the United States, including towns and cities across Massachusetts. The cancellation cut off \$90 million in funding designated for 18 communities, a regional planning commission, and two state agencies in MA.

Healey noted that communities across Massachusetts have faced devastating impacts from severe storms, flooding, and wildfires in recent years. She emphasized that FEMA funding is critical not just for recovery, but for protecting against future extreme weather events. Healey also stated that this move by the Trump Administration will make communities less safe and will increase costs for residents, towns, cities, and businesses.

The cancellation of BRIC will affect many projects in Boston, including a \$23 million project for Moakley Park in South Boston, which would implement coastal resilience measures. An \$11 million project to promote recreation and climate resilience at Tenean Beach in Dorchester is also expected to be impacted by the cancellation of BRIC. Over \$500,000 for higher flood standards for building codes will be impacted, according to the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

While neighborhoods such as Roslindale, Hyde Park, Mattapan and West Roxbury were not directly impacted by the funding cuts, the broader impact will likely still have an effect. "Neighborhoods like Hyde Park, Mattapan, and Roslindale already face a disproportionate burden when it comes to environmental risks and infrastructure challenges. Stripping away federal support means fewer resources for flood mitigation, fewer upgrades to aging drainage systems, and fewer protections for homes, schools, and businesses. This will have a ripple effect — not just in terms of physical damage when the next storm hits, but in the economic and emotional toll it takes on families who are left without the support they deserve," said District 5 City Councilor Enrique Pepen. "Here in Boston, we don't have the luxury of ignoring these risks — and the consequences of this decision will fall hardest on the communities that can least afford it." He stated that disaster prevention is not partisan; it is a matter of public safety and equity and called on the federal government to restore the funding.

Roslindale's Hawthorne Street has faced frequent flooding in recent years, with basements and backyards regularly overwhelmed by water. In nearby West Roxbury, heavy storms have brought down large trees, damaging cars and homes. The frequency of heavy precipitation in Boston has increased, leading to more instances of flash flooding. Climate change is projected to increase the frequency and intensity of storms in all regions of the United States.

Stacia Sheputa, the Director of Communications for Environment for the City of Boston, explained that Boston remains committed to advancing climate resilience work. "We [the City of Boston] have built a nationally recognized foundation through years of proactive planning, community engagement, and investment, and that work continues. These are generational projects that will take years to complete and while any funding setback presents challenges, it does not change our long-term vision or commitment," she remarked. The city is pursuing alternative sources of support, including state programs like the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program, additional federal grants, and new partnerships. They are also working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop an extensive coastal protection plan.

Mayor Wu also spoke out against the disaster prevention aid cuts. "These crucial projects follow years of community planning for critical access to open space while securing vulnerable flood paths so that thousands of families in the surrounding neighborhoods would be protected from storm surge and coastal flooding," she stated. Wu vowed to fight to restore the funding to protect Boston neighborhoods.

BRIC, which was created by Congress in 2018, is a FEMA-funded Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grant administered in partnership with the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA). BRIC supported projects such as flood control systems, wildfire prevention, stormwater management upgrades, and strengthened building codes for states, municipalities, and tribal governments.