



Alliance for
National & Community
Resilience®

2021 Resilience Designations Community Resilience Benchmarks[®]

Martinsville, Virginia



About the Community

Martinsville, Virginia is a city of approximately 15,000 people in the greater reaches of Roanoke and Blacksburg to the north and Winston-Salem and Greensboro to the south. The City of 10 square miles is nestled within the rolling piedmont hills of south-central Virginia flanked by Jones Creek and Mulberry Creek that feed the Smith River on the City's southwestern edge.

The Benchmarks

The City set out to evaluate itself against the first two available benchmarks developed by ANCR: Buildings and Housing. While the two benchmarks focused on different disciplines and different aspects of community services, and therefore required different sets of expertise, Martinsville capably approached both benchmarks with a small team led by the chief building official with more than a decade of experience working with the city. The "small town" nature of this community and its city services created opportunities for easier access to information, personnel, and institutional memory, however this context may have also limited the need for more formal documentation of some city services, programs, and partnerships, making some of the benchmarking process more difficult as evidence was sought to substantiate claims.

Successes and Insights

The pilot benchmarking process illuminated practiced and inherent strengths in the City's policies, programs, and approaches to community resilience. Martinsville had much to show for many years of methodical administration of building safety codes, training of personnel, and crafting and practicing emergency management plans. Partnerships across city departments and with local and regional institutions have created nested institutions at various scales that are making the most of the limited resources of a small jurisdiction in a rural county. Policies and programs at the state level in Virginia not only guide building safety standards, licensing requirements, and emergency management schemes but also provide a wealth of resources for education and training and relief, when needed.



The benchmarking process inspired new actions to establish resilience as a clearer ambition for the city, its programs, and personnel. Interdepartmental collaboration formalized informal protocols and introduced new methods such as more formally tracking permit violations and initiating internal best-practices that screen for environmental justice in policy making and in development decisions. A survey of local builders and developers provided constructive feedback on how the city is doing in its program administration and highlighted that the city could do more to educate and promote resilient building and housing practices, including insurance. In response to various real or perceived gaps, Martinsville developed a new webpage on [Community Resilience](#) and worked with the city council to develop and adopt a [resolution](#) affirming the City's commitments to strengthening resilience in the community and resourcing those efforts.

One outcome of the benchmarking process was the identification of areas for improvement as Martinsville aims to become an even more resilient community. Cities of such small size may benefit from close ties and strong institutional memory, but informal processes are less resilient to staff turnover and may lack the structure that is often needed when disaster strikes. The City learned that it could do much more to promote the benefits of resilient building design and construction, whether through public and professional education or through the establishment of incentives, guided processes, or requirements to drive building owners and developers to enhance resilience in buildings and homes. Disaster preparedness and response plans could also invite more inclusive participation. In all areas, continuing to measure impact and continually calibrating policy and programs will be essential to refining resilience strategies that are optimized for the community and improving Martinsville's ANCR benchmark results in its next review period.