

CHAPTER 15: TOWN OF KELLER

TOWN PROFILE

Keller is located near the central spine of the Eastern Shore in south central Accomack County and comprises 218 acres. The town was originally called Pungoteague Station and was established around a railroad station, which was the center of economic activity for the Town. Once Keller was no longer used as a rail station, economic conditions began to change (*Town of Keller Comprehensive Plan, 2006*). The Town of Keller was incorporated in 1951.



Figure 1: Town of Keller Context and Google Map

SOCIO-ECONOMIC

Part of assessing hazards in relation to their risk is understanding the people affected. Not all people are affected equally. Some are affected by the factors relating to their ability to understand risks posed by hazards, and some by their ability to remove themselves from harm's way. Those factors include age, mobility, income and the languages individuals speak and the languages in which individuals are able to access information.

DEMOGRAPHICS

According to Table 1, the population in the Town of Keller has remained relatively stable over the last couple decades. The median age for the Town is 53.9, indicating an older population that would typically need additional assistance during a hazard. The high median age, poverty levels, and number of individuals with a disability are also important factors to consider when planning for a hazard.

There has been an influx of Spanish-speaking households moving into the area, so it is likely the data in Table 1 below indicating languages spoken is inaccurate (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021). Town Officials point to the 2010 Census figures as being anomalous and inconsistent with their knowledge of the Town (Personal communications, Town Council, November 4, 2015). Although the population may be accurate, the median household income and the languages spoken are likely not.

Table 1: Keller Demographic Data

	2020	2014**	2013**	2010***	2000****
Population	144	178	151	178	173
Median Age	53.9*	37	37.9	47.5	40.2
Disability	24*	NA	NA	NA	NA
Income					
Median Household Income	\$28,906*	\$18,875	\$15,625	\$49,375	\$25,500
Poverty Level	28.5%*	NA	47.7%	NA	NA
Language					
Only English	99.3%*	100%	100%	75%	97.6%
Other	0.7%*	0.0%	0.0%	25%	2.4%
Spanish	0.0%*	0.0%	0.0%	9.6%	2.4%
Ind-Euro	0.7%*	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Asian	0.0%*	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	0.0%*	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: U.S. Census 2020, *ACS, 2014-2019, **ACS, 2009-2014, ***US Census 2010, ****US Census 2000

WORKFORCE

Employment patterns are important to examine for two reasons. It can help to identify concentrations of people for hazard information dissemination or hazard rescue and evacuation. It can also identify where disruptions in employment and income might occur in the aftermath of a disaster.

The local workforce primarily consists of Retail Trade and Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, and Food. Construction and Wholesale Trade industries dominate the employed population in Keller as well (ACS, 2014-2019). This is reflecting of Keller being primarily a residential, white-collar community (*Town of Keller Comprehensive Plan*, 2006). The workforce saw a significant drop between 2010 and 2014, but increased back to previous numbers in 2019 (ACS, 2014-2019).

Table 2: Keller Local Workforce Industry

Civilian Employed Population										
Industry	2019*		2014**		2012**		2010**		2000***	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Agriculture, forestry, fishing/hunting, or mining	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Construction	10	15.6%	5	13.9%	5	20.8%	18	27.7%	5	8.3%
Manufacturing	4	6.3%	10	27.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	13	21.7%
Wholesale trade	10	15.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Retail trade	15	23.4%	4	11.1%	0	0.0%	12	18.5%	10	16.7%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	6.7%
Information	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	3.3%
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rentals	4	6.3%	2	5.6%	2	8.3%	2	3.1%	1	1.7%
Professional, scientific, waste management	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	6.2%	4	6.7%
Educational and health care services	8	12.5%	9	25.0%	10	41.7%	18	27.7%	16	26.7%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, food	12	18.8%	0	0.0%	3	12.5%	7	10.8%	3	5.0%
Public Admin	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Other	1	1.6%	6	16.7%	4	16.7%	4	6.2%	2	3.3%
TOTAL CIVILIAN EMPLOYED POPULATION	64	-	36	-	24	-	65	-	60	-

Source: *ACS, 2014-2019, **ACS, 2010-2014, ***U.S. Census, 2000

BUSINESSES

Business data provides basic information used in projecting potential economic losses from business and employment disruption, along with wage losses to employees. It can also serve as an indicator of community recovery resources. Finally, it can help to prioritize restoration of utility and infrastructure functions following a high-intensity hazard.

Keller is primarily a residential community, which is reflective upon the low number of businesses within the Town. An antique shop, storage units, 84 Lumber, OrthoFit, and two automotive dealerships, J&J Auto Sales and Preston Ford, are located in Town (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021). There is also a non-profit homeless shelter and a post office. The Town has been having zoning and ordinance issues relating to “back-yard” businesses and are currently working to resolve these problems while also promoting economic development (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021).

Table 3: Keller Business Establishment Types

Industry Code Description	Total Establishments			
	2021	2013	2011	2009
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	0	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0	0
Manufacturing	0	0	0	0
Wholesale Trade	0	0	0	0
Retail Trade	2	3	3	4
Transportation and Warehousing	1	0	1	1
Information	0	0	0	0
Finance and Insurance	0	1	1	1
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	0	1	0	0
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	3	1	2	2
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	0	0	0	0
Health Care and Social Assistance	1	2	2	2
Accommodation and Food Services	0	0	0	0
Other Services (Except Public Admin)	2	1	1	1
Industries not classified	0	0	0	0
Total, All Establishments	9	9	10	11
Total Employees	-	63	64	52

Source: Personal Communications, Town Council, May 4, 2021, Census Zip Code Business Patterns, 2013, 2011, 2009

BUILT INFRASTRUCTURE

§201.6(d)(3) Housing units, community facilities, and transportation are all important factors when considering hazard resiliency. They provide the social services necessary during hazardous scenarios, safe cover for those wanting to stay, and a way to leave towards safety. Keller's soils and their inability to support on-site septic systems prevent the Town from developing more housing or commercial areas (*Town of Keller Comprehensive Plan, 2006*).

HOUSING UNITS

Knowledge of a community's housing base contributes to hazard and vulnerability analysis by identifying how many homes are at risk.

There are 86 total housing units in Keller (Personal communications, Town Council, May 4, 2021) and the housing market is relatively stable, consisting primarily of single-family housing (ACS, 2014-2019). There are 20 vacant units in Town, one of which is being used as a vacation home (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021). Many of these vacant structures are in poor condition due to owners not living in the area and being unable to maintain their properties. Vacant units can be dangerous during a hazard due to lack of year-round maintenance and loose yard debris. Town officials stated that they have proposed an incremental tax increase and auctions will soon take place in an attempt to negate the issue. In the last five years, there has only been one demolition; however, the Town is taking steps to complete more (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021).

Table 4: Keller Housing

	2019*	2014**	2010***	2000****
Total Housing Units	88	76	87	90
Occupied	67	54	68	72
Vacant	21	22	19	18
Owner-Occupied	42	42	47	47
Renter-Occupied	25	12	21	21
Median Housing Value	\$108,800	\$129,200	NA	NA

Source: *ACS, 2014-2019, **ACS, 2010-2014, ***U.S. Census 2010, ****U.S. Census 2000

TRANSPORTATION

U.S. Route 13 is Keller’s most visible transportation feature, bisecting the town with 18,000 vehicles per day. The four-lane principal arterial is part of the national defense Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET), a national system of highways necessary to support U.S. military operations, part of the National Highway System, and the Eastern Shore’s only hurricane evacuation route. The abandoned and preserved railroad corridor parallels U.S. Route 13. The intent is to convert this 49.1-mile stretch into a multi-use shared path that will become the Eastern Shore Rail Trail. There are no scheduled Star Transit stops in Keller; however, Shore Ride is available and operates up and down the Eastern Shore.

Vehicles available to households is one indicator of a household’s ability to evacuate when necessary, and Table 5 reveals no risk from this status. Speeding has been an issue in the Town and there have been several accidents at the intersection of Route 13 and Second Street. The Town now has a contracted deputy from the Accomack County Sheriff’s Department to monitor speeding (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021).

Table 5: Keller Vehicles Available per Household

Vehicles Available	*2019	2014**	2010**	2000***
None	0	1	0	9
One	32	20	25	18
Two	19	20	28	40
Three or more	16	13	16	5

Source: *ACS, 2014-2019, **ACS, 2010-2014; ***U.S. Census, 2000

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Community facilities are facilities required to support the services and functions provided by the Town government or in coordination with other public and private entities. These facilities enhance the overall quality of life for the Town and its citizens. It’s important to note what facilities are available in case of a hazard, and it’s important to make an inventory of facilities that could be affected by a hazard.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Keller does not have its own police department; however, an off-duty contractual Accomack County deputy patrols the Town at random. Police protection is provided by the Accomack County Sheriff Department and the Virginia State Police. Fire protection is provided by the Melfa and Painter Volunteer Fire and Rescue Companies (Personal communication, Town Council, May 4, 2021). Information regarding equipment inventory and capabilities can be found in the Town of Melfa and Town of Painter respective chapters.

WATER SUPPLY & SEWAGE DISPOSAL

All residential treatment of wastewater is done through on-site septic systems. The Town has no public water supply and residents and commercial users are solely reliant on private wells. The Town is interested in connecting to the new HRSD line that will run through the Town (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021).

SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL

The Town contracts Davis Disposal to provide weekly solid waste disposal and periodic junk and debris removal (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021). There are two free Accomack County convenience centers located nearby, the Grangeville center on Wachapreague Road, and the Painter center on Wayside Drive. The County landfill is also only about 2.5 miles from the Town, just west on Route 620.

POWER AND COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE

The Town's location on Route 13 typically allows for ease of access for any repairs to the power line system. This location also provides access to the broadband optic cable which runs on Route 13. Keller has been working with ANEC to ensure the proper function of street lights in Town (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021).

PARKS AND RECREATION

There are no Parks within the Town. There is interest in turning the Town Hall parking lot in a recreational area (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021).

STORM WATER DRAINAGE

The County and VDOT are responsible for the majority of the ditch maintenance in the Town. There have been many issues regarding settling water and storm water drainage. The Town has been working with the County and VDOT to resolve these issues. In 2018-2019, VDOT signed off on an easement aquifer and the County has continued to work to clean the main ditch. A few ditches in Town have been removed and underground drainage lines installed (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021). Due to frequent storm water flooding and the reliance of individual wells and septic systems, this is of the utmost importance to pursue and complete.

SCHOOLS

There are no schools within the Town of Keller.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Keller encompasses 218 acres. Elevations in the Town range from approximately 30- to 40-feet, with a local high spot of 44-feet above mean sea level, and slopes are typically less than 2%. Most of the soils in Keller are not ideal for development due to the majority soil type being unsuitable for individual land-based waste water treatment facilities, like septic systems (*Town of Keller Comprehensive Plan*, 2006). There have been large amounts of forest land purchased recently within Town limits. The area has been cleared, but it is unclear if there are any plans in place for the land (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021).

LAND USE LAND COVER

Forests, development, and agriculture are the three highest uses of land for the Town.

GROUND WATER

The Town of Keller is completely reliant on groundwater and faces a threat of contamination from several sources, including failed septic systems within the Town, leaks and spills of petroleum-based products from underground storage tanks, and major industrial facilities within the area (*Town of Keller Comprehensive Plan*, 2006).

HAZARD PREPAREDNESS & COMMUNITY CAPABILITIES

PREVIOUS HAZARD MITIGATION PLANS

§201.6(b)(3), §201.6(c)(3), §201.6(d)(3) Keller has participated in the hazard mitigation planning process since 2011. The Town's primary risk associated with hazards is storm water flooding. Keller's comprehensive plan has not been updated since 2006. The Town is interested in pursuing an updated comprehensive plan. The plan from 2006 does emphasize drainage problems within the Town.

Table 6: Town of Keller Hazard Mitigation Resources

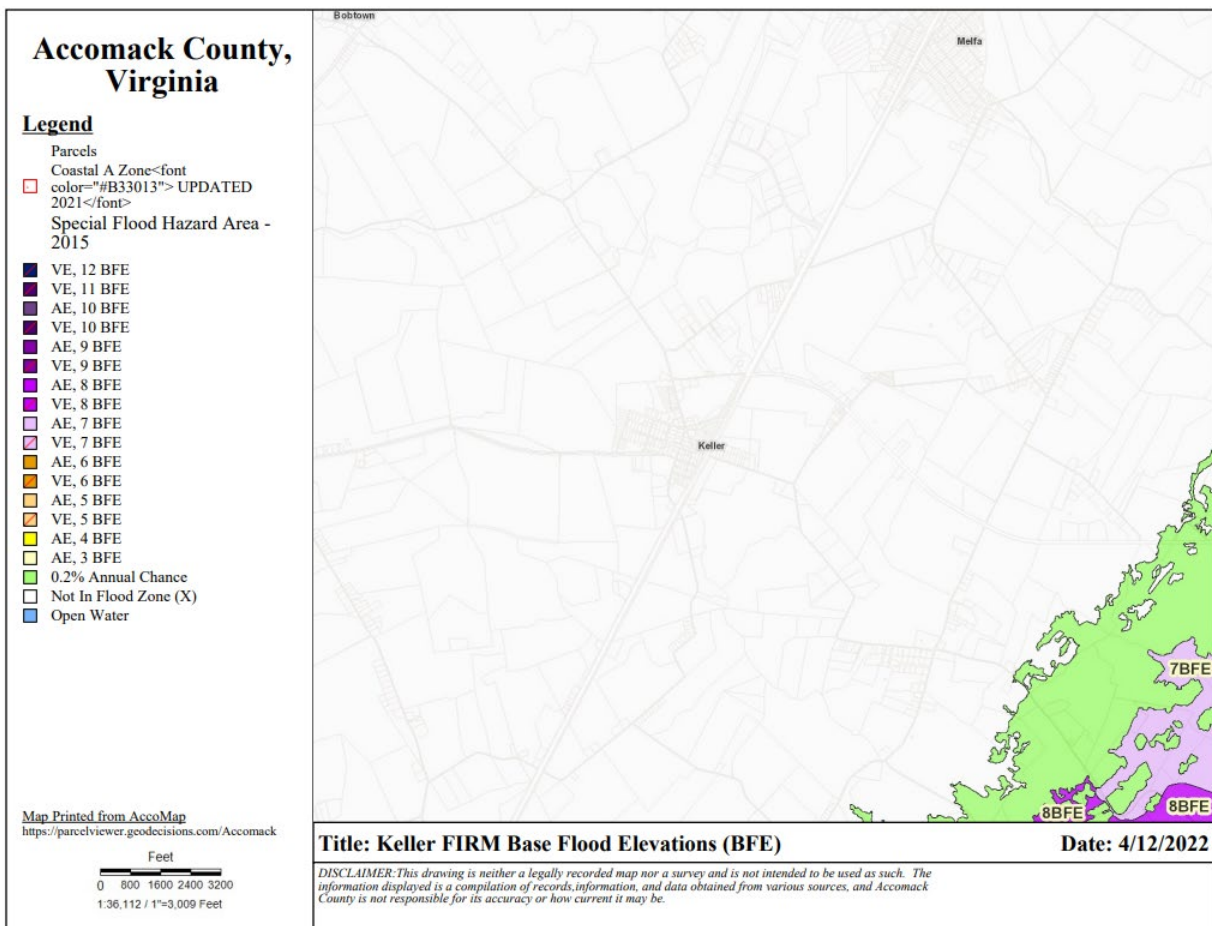
	Ordinances, Plans, & Publications														Resources, Committees			
Authority	Building Code	Chesapeake Bay Act	SWMP	Hazard Mitigation Plan	Comprehensive Plan	Zoning/Subdivision Ordinance	Storm Water Regulations	Transportation Infrastructure Inundation Vulnerability Report	All Hazards Preparedness	Emergency Operations Plans	Mutual Aid Agreements/Documents	Neighborhood Emergency Help	Virginia Hurricane Evacuation	Oil & HazMat Response Plan; HazMat Commodity Flow	Ground Water Committee	Navigable Waterways Committee	Climate Adaptation Working Group	ES Disaster Preparedness Coalition
Local					*	*												
County	*		*															
Regional				*				*	*	*				*	*	*	*	*
State		*					*						*					
Federal		*																

NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM & HAZARD MITIGATION GRANT PROGRAM

NFIP

§201.6(c)(2)(ii), §201.6(c)(3)(ii), §201.6(d)(3) The Town does not currently participate in the NFIP, but has expressed interest in potentially joining the program in addition to the Community Rating System (CRS) Program. No areas of the Town lie within a Special Flood Hazard Area. More information on repetitive loss properties, NFIP policies and claims, and the CRS program can be found in Chapter 6: Coastal Flooding and Chapter 9: The Region.

Figure 2: Town of Keller FIRM Base Flood Elevation (BFE)



HMGP

Keller has not participated in the HMGP.

HAZARD PROFILE

§201.6(c)(2)(i), §201.6(c)(2)(ii), §201.6(d)(3) Stormwater flooding poses the greatest risk to the Town and has the most frequent impact.

PANDEMIC RESPONSE AND READINESS

The Town of Keller was able to make several necessary changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Town Hall was revamped to include plexiglass shields, sanitizer stations, and a walk-up cashier window for the public to utilize. Residents were provided two rounds of Care packages in reusable hand totes, which included sanitizer, toilet paper, paper towels, disinfectant, and masks. CARES Act funding also provided the Town Council, Town Clerk, and the Mayor new laptops and equipment needed to meet virtually. A new hot water heater was also purchased as the Town Hall was previously without hot water for proper hand-washing. Social distancing and mask signage were placed in necessary locations and the outside deck was extended to provide room for social distancing (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021).

The Town has the ability to store an abundance of supplies and revert back to COVID-19 mandates, if ever needed for a similar, future event.

HIGH WIND

No parts of the Town lie in the wind-borne debris hazard area. This area is defined as the area extending one mile inland from the coast. The Town lies in the 110-120 mph design wind zone ([Accomack County Building Code](#)). Most of the residential areas are older and have mature trees in and around the homes. During a high wind event, falling branches or trees may damage some structures or power lines. All power and communication lines in Town are above ground and susceptible to wind damage.

Keller has experienced several historic wind events from hurricanes and nor'easters that have damaged trees and power lines in Town. The Town Hall sustained roof damage during one of the many nor'easters that hit the region. The Town also has a number of derelict buildings, which may pose a danger of flying debris or even collapse during high wind events (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021).

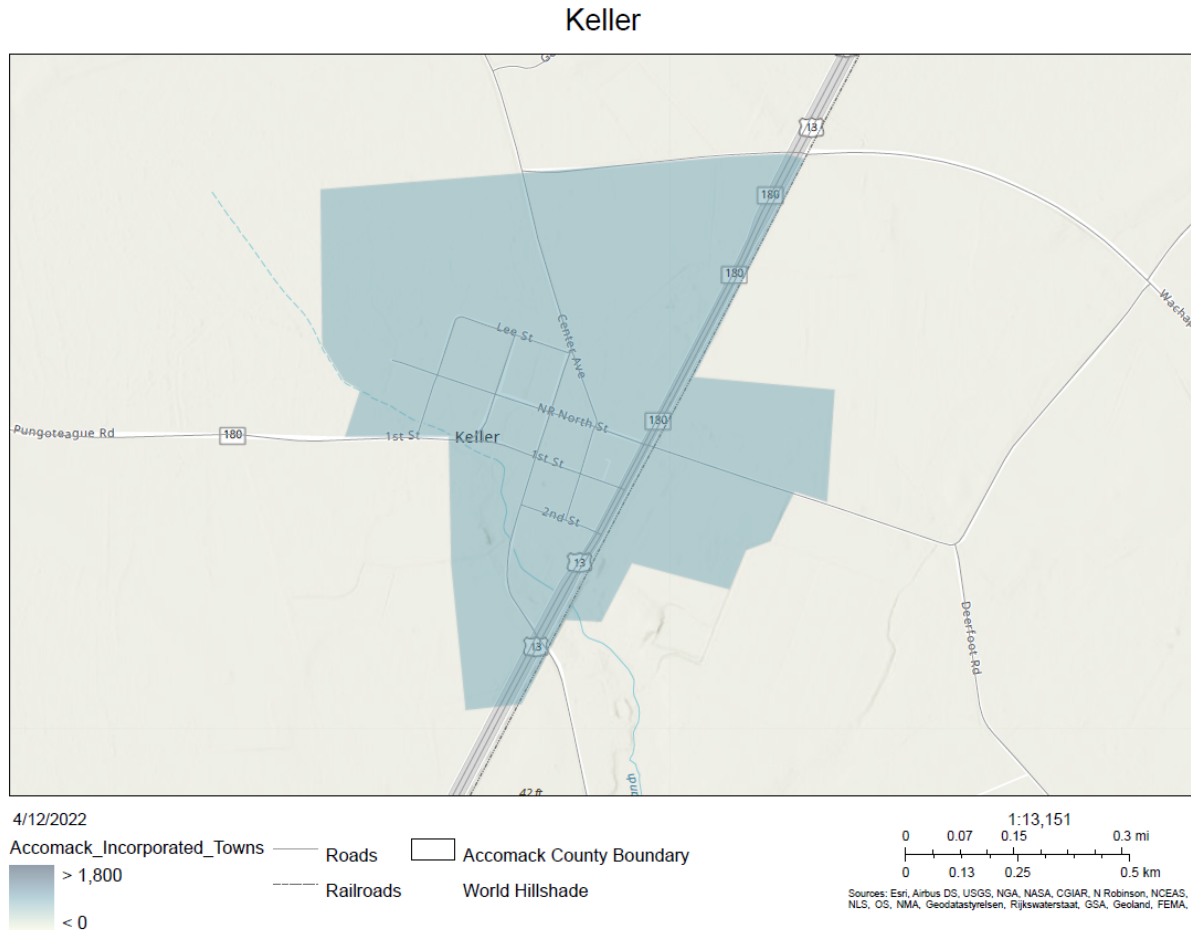
COASTAL EROSION

No structures are at immediate risk to coastal erosion.

COASTAL FLOODING

No portions of the Town lie within a Special Flood Hazard Area or within the X Zone, which is the 500-year floodplain. The threat of coastal flooding within in the Town is considered to be minimal.

Figure 3: Town of Keller Flood Hazards to Infrastructure



STORM WATER FLOODING

Storm water flooding poses the greatest risk to the Town and has the most frequent impact. The majority of the Town contains soils that are poorly drained and readily retain rainwater. The Town's poorly drained soils are located primarily in the central and northern portions of Town. The intersection where N.R. North Street and H. West Avenue meets at Center Avenue is prone to frequent flooding as well as where H. West Avenue meets Second Street near the Methodist Church. VDOT and the County have been working to resolve these issues (Personal communication, Town Council, April 16, 2021).

Keller regularly experiences storm water flooding during heavy rain events. Drainage problems in Town have been attributed to the soil characteristics, lack of sufficient topography for drainage, and lack of maintenance to existing drainage culverts. The Town relies on the Virginia Department of Transportation and Accomack County to perform maintenance on the main drainage ditches within the Town limits (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021).

Drainage issues were previously experienced at the intersection of Center Avenue, H. West Avenue, and Lee Street and the northern end of H. West Avenue. These areas have poorly maintained ditches that have silted with sediment and become overgrown with vegetation. The ditch near the intersection of Lee Street and Center Avenue has been

Town of Keller

removed and underground drainage has helped to mitigate storm water flooding in this area (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021). Town officials indicate that there has been no residential or commercial property damage within Town as a result from storm water flooding.

The town has historically experienced severe storm water flooding events. Town officials recall at least two major flooding events where streets were inundated with rain water to the point where residents were traveling down the streets in boats in the areas of Town that still experiences flooding today. These flood waters remained for approximately 24 hours. The Town experienced severe storm water flooding again throughout the Fall and Winter in both 2019 and 2020 (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021). The majority of houses in Town are elevated and Town officials do not remember structures being inundated during these flood events.

Table 7: Stormwater Problem Areas in Keller

	HMP 2011, 2016, 2021
Flooding Problem Areas	Central and northern parts of the town. Intersection of Center Avenue H. West Street Lee Street Northern end of West Street
Critical Facilities Identified	Keller Town Hall Keller Post Office
Cause of Hazard	Soils poorly drain and tend to retain rainwater Lack of sufficient topography for drainage Lack of maintenance to existing drainage culverts

HAZARDS OF LOCAL SIGNIFICANCE

FIRE AND SMOKE

The Town does not have a fire department and relies on the fire departments of neighboring communities. This puts the Town at greater risk for fire damage. Specifically, there are numerous fields in the vicinity of the Town that are prone to catching fire, especially during droughts. These fires have the potential of spreading to residences in Town, especially since there are houses in Town that are dilapidated and most are located in close proximity to one another.

ICE AND SNOW

The Town historically has been impacted by snow and ice storms that have left residents stranded for extended periods of time. Since the Town has a relatively elderly average population, these residences are at a greater risk during these events. Additionally, the Town relies on VDOT to maintain the roads during these events, and often takes some time for roads to be cleared (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021).

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

The U.S. Route 13 highway corridor runs through Town putting residents at greater risk from HAZMAT incidences resulting from traffic accidents involving tractor trailers carrying hazardous materials. In addition, a chemical production facility is located just on the outskirts of Town limits. This facility contributes to greater traffic containing hazardous materials through Town (Personal communications, Town Council, April 16, 2021).

TORNADOES

Tornadoes have not historically hit within the Town of Keller; however, it was suspected that a tornado destroyed a commercial building and damaged another commercial building in Town in 1998.

Figure 4: U.S. Route 13 and the Former Railroad in Keller. Photo by Curt Smith



CRITICAL FACILITIES

The following table lists the critical facilities and their relative importance to the Town.

Table 8 : Town of Keller Critical Facilities

Facility	Hazards	HMP 2006	HMP 2011	HMP 2016	HMP 2021	No. of People Affected	Loss Potential	Relocation Potential	Retrofit Potential
Town-Owned Facilities									
Keller Town Office	Storm Water Flooding Wind	-	X	X	X	151+	Major disruption	No	Yes
Keller Post Office	Storm Water Flooding Wind	-	X	X	X	151+	Major disruption	No	Yes

Figure 5: The Keller Town Office. Photo by Curt Smith



FINDINGS

1. Stormwater flooding and high wind events have historically been and currently are the main hazards facing the Town.
2. The Town of Keller does not currently participate in the NFIP or CRS Program, but is interested in joining so residents and businesses can purchase flood insurance.
3. Secondary hazards facing the Town are HazMat incidents impacting water and air quality, winter storms, groundwater contamination, drought, and fire.
4. The Town has identified areas that have poorly maintained drainage ditches that regularly cause stormwater flooding hazards. The Town has been and will continue to mitigate these problems.