



Project Management: Lessons Learned from the Storm

Recovery and Rebuild Efforts in Vilonia

Marty Knight, PMP

President – Knight Business Solutions, LLC



About Vilonia

- **POPULATION: 450 (1970) – 4,000 (2015)**

The population of Vilonia has grown dramatically since 1970. The city has sustained a growth rate of approximately 80% over that period. The growth is largely attributed to families who choose to live in Vilonia, but work in the Little Rock/North Little Rock metropolitan area or in nearby Conway and Cabot.

- **DRAMATIC GROWTH | DEMOGRAPHICS**

Two primary groups are represented within Vilonia's population today. The first is those who are "native" to the community – those who have lived in Vilonia for many years, perhaps generations. The second group is comprised of families who have moved there since 1990.

- **MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME | ECONOMIC ADVANTANGES**

According to 2013 US Census data, the city of Vilonia has the second highest median household income in the state of Arkansas at \$70,728. The city with the highest median household income is Maumelle at \$80,626 and third is Bryant at \$59,380. The average for the state of Arkansas is \$41,267. The economic potential for the city is outstanding.

- **CHALLENGES AND CULTURE**

The primary economic challenge for Vilonia is that so many of it's residents live in Vilonia because of the social environment, including schools, churches, and family activities, but choose the larger cities in close proximity for shopping, entertainment and service. The result is what is referred to in economic development parlance as "leakage." Revenue is leaving the community at very high rates and opportunities for new businesses to retain those spendable dollars is high.



About the 2011 Storm

- MONDAY, APRIL 25, 2011 – EF2 Tornado at 7:27 PM
 - ✓ Half-mile wide path of 110 MPH straight-line winds

The path of the tornado extended from an area southwest of Vilonia, near the small community of Saltillo, to an area immediately northeast of Vilonia.
 - ✓ Damage to 100-150 structures | 12-15 homes totally destroyed
 - ✓ Limited commercial impact

Most of the businesses that sustained damage were impacted for a relatively short period time. Few businesses were considered total losses.
 - ✓ Approximately 20 injuries and 4 deaths



About the 2011 Storm



Examples of damage done to homes by the tornado.



About the 2014 Storm

- SUNDAY, APRIL 27, 2014 – EF4 Tornado with 200 MP winds at 7:48 PM

- ✓ HUNDREDS OF HOMES LOST, INCLUDING TWO ENTIRE SUBDIVISIONS

The storm originated in western Pulaski County, crossed the Arkansas River and left a 26-mile track across all of Faulkner County. The intensity of the storm increased as it approached Vilonia, reaching its peak within the city limits. After much debate as to whether or not to assign an EF-5 or EF-4 rating, the National Weather Service settled on the latter, due to construction quality standards.

- ✓ 55 OF 78 BUSINESSES WITHIN THE CITY WERE LOST

- ✓ \$13 MILLION SCHOOL FACILITY (NEARING COMPLETION) WAS A TOTAL LOSS

- ✓ 90% OF HISTORIC DOWNTOWN STRUCTURES WERE DESTROYED

- ✓ OVER 90 INJURED AND 8 DEATHS

The storm took 16 lives, half of which were residents of the Vilonia area.



About the 2014 Storm



Damage done in downtown Vilonia.





Impact and Need: July 2014

- **CITY GOVERNMENT OVERWHELMED WITH IMMEDIATE NEEDS**

The relatively small city government and administration had to prioritize activities in the days and weeks following the storm. The severity and magnitude of the damage done by the storm meant that the primary focus was upon immediate response, cleanup and removal of debris and the restoration of basic services. Officials at both the city and county did an amazing job, but little resource remained for recovery planning.

It is also noteworthy that the lessons learned from the 2011 disaster were limited in their application to the 2014 tornado. The most valuable lessons learned from 2011 were those associated with immediate response – coordination of emergency responders, location of survivors, and initial communications. The magnitude of the 2014 tornado created an entirely different scenario relative to long-term recovery.

- **ASSISTANCE FROM FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENT**

The response from government agencies at both the Federal and State level was amazing; however, the primary resource provided by these agencies was in the form of framework. They provided guidance as to how to go about recovery, but depended upon local resources to apply the framework.

- **QUESTION: WHO WILL PLAN RECOVERY?**

By June 2014 the most pressing question became, “Who will plan the long-term recovery?” The Rebuild Vilonia organization had its origins in mid-June and gained traction with a public meeting held in early July 2014. The initial planning efforts did not involve city government. The effort began as a grass-roots effort led by volunteer residents.



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- FORMATION OF REBUILD VILONIA ORGANIZATION

- ✓ **SCOPE MANAGEMENT**

- The initial scope of Rebuild Vilonia was the rebuilding of the downtown area. Other organizations, in place as a result of the 2011 storm, assumed leadership in the areas of housing and benevolent needs for survivors. It was also determined that the organization would not have a budget, solicit or manage donations, or have paid staff. This proved to be a wise choice and provided a great deal of freedom.

- ✓ **ORGANIZATION, LEADERSHIP AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

- The project management principles found within the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) were applied in forming and organizing the Rebuild Vilonia organization. In spite of the fact that the initial number of volunteers was high, nearing 100, that number dwindled to around a dozen. The skillset of volunteers was evaluated very early to determine the resources available.

- ENGAGEMENT WITH SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

- ✓ **AUTHORIZATION AND CHARTER**

- It became apparent very quickly that the Rebuild Vilonia organization could not act in an official capacity without authority to do so. The absence of this authority limited effectiveness in working with government agencies. Project management principles were used to facilitate a charter of the organization by the city. The Vilonia City Council, acting on a recommendation from the Mayor, authorized Rebuild Vilonia in early September 2014 to act on the city's behalf relative to planning.

- ✓ **SCHEDULE DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT**

- Perhaps the single largest impact made by project management was the contribution of schedule development. Using the planning framework provided by supporting agencies, Rebuild Vilonia was able to effectively schedule the activities needed to develop the long-term plan and meet aggressive target delivery dates.



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- DEVELOPMENT OF VILONIA 2030 PLAN

- ✓ SCOPE

- The long-term recovery plan, which came to be officially known as the Vilonia 2030 Plan, was based upon significant input from the community. It was developed and published in partnership with numerous agencies and volunteers. The Plan was presented to the City Council in early April 2015 and was adopted by Council in a public meeting held on the one-year anniversary of the tornado. Adoption of the plan means that it will serve as the foundation for future recovery and planning. Relative to scope management, six specific areas for recovery were identified and included in the plan, representing project deliverables.

- ✓ TEAM MANAGEMENT, CONSENSUS BUILDING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS

- Project management principles were used extensively for the formation and management of the Rebuild Vilonia team. The required format for gathering ideas and input was the use of a public forums. This included open meetings with residents, social media and direct contact. Project management aided in the building of consensus, determining which ideas needed pursuit, and the avoidance and resolution of conflict that inevitably arises in such scenarios.

- WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- ✓ WE SHALL SEE!

- Like other communities who have experienced disaster, Vilonia has come to realize that long-term recovery is a marathon – not a sprint. As Vilonia progresses toward a bright future, the Vilonia 2030 Plan serves as a solid foundation on which to build. It provides guidance and direction as that recovery takes place. The plan would not have been possible without application of project management principles. One of the recommendations of the Plan was the formation of an implementation task force. This was completed in July 2015 with the formation of REVIVE, an initiative of the city to implement the ideas and recommendations found in the Vilonia 2030 Plan. We look forward to watching Vilonia grow as a result of this effort.



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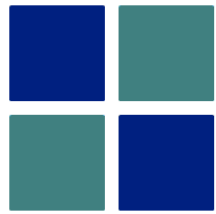
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VILONIA 2030 PLAN

The published plan can be found in multiple locations:

[CITY OF VILONIA WEBSITE](#)

[KNIGHT BUSINESS SOLUTIONS](#)



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BUSINESS SOLUTIONS, LLC

MARTY KNIGHT, PMP

Knight Business Solutions, LLC

<http://knightbusiness.com>

marty@knightbusiness.com

501.269.0450

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