

Volusia County Tornado Response Press Conference

Wednesday, August 19, 2020

Kevin Captain – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

Jim Judge - Director, Emergency Management for Volusia County

Ben Bartlett – Director, Road and Bridge Division for Volusia County

Michael Pleus - City Manager for the City of DeLand

Robert Apgar – Mayor for the City of DeLand

Kevin Captain – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

Good afternoon, I am Kevin Captain, Community Information Director for Volusia County government. Today is August 19th, we are in the city of DeLand, in the Chambers, and this is a press conference to discuss yesterday's tornado that went through DeLand. Speakers today will be Jim Judge, Emergency Management Director for Volusia County government. Also, joining him is Ben Bartlett, he is the Road and Bridge Director for Volusia County government. And, with the city of DeLand we have the City Manager, Michael Pleus, Mayor Bob Apgar, and we also have to answer questions as they come, Police Chief, Jason Umberger with the City of DeLand. We also have Public Works Director, Demetris Pressley with the City of DeLand. And, Sheriff Chitwood could not make it with us today but he certainly gives his best, and his team is working on this storm's clean up as well. With that, and without any further ado, Mr. Judge.

Jim Judge - Director, Emergency Management for Volusia County

Thank you Kevin and good afternoon everyone. Well, we certainly did have some significant weather go through yesterday afternoon and it was quite significant, and even quite significant damage in the DeLand area, both in the city and in the unincorporated county. So, with that we contacted the National

Weather Service out of Melbourne, and we had two meteorologists come today to inspect the damage, and yes, it was in fact a confirmed tornado. It was a high F1 or a low F2. And that F2 tornado starts at about 113 mph and goes up to about 176 mph, but we had anywhere between 105 and 115 mph. It touched down at approximately 3:48 p.m., travelled east-northeast for about four and a half miles before lifting at approximately 4:00 p.m. The largest swath of the tornado was about 500 yards wide. So, with that, of course, you know, if you've seen the damage from the television or even in the area we had downed power lines, we had fallen trees, and a lot of vegetative debris. Severe damage to homes and businesses and even some of that is still being assessed on the levels of damage to both businesses and private residences. But, with that we responded very quickly with the County and City Officials, the Sheriff's Office, City Police, County Fire, City Fire, all working together. And, of then of course from the County Public Works, from both the city and the county. I always refer to our Public Works folks, both at the City and the County, as the hidden heroes of Public Safety, because they get out; it's very grueling work, it's very dangerous work and they work to get the roadways cleared. And then of course, working with Duke Energy, having them come in and work with us to get those power lines, not only cleared, but then also get the power restored.

EMS did transport one patient with minor injuries and there was one patient that needed some sheltering, and in fact there were no widespread injuries. The Red Cross was a big help in finding shelter for that one individual.

The Volusia County Property Appraisers Office is on the scene assessing the damage and they will be anticipating the damage estimates that we will get later today. Initially we had approximately 11,000 homes without power; homes and businesses. And, as of 2:00 p.m. today power has been restored, to all but about 1,000 homes and businesses, and some of those, because of the damage may take a little bit of time to get back on. But, we anticipate power restoration for 99.9% of those remaining 1,000 to be up by 6:00 p.m. tonight.

And, again, we had multiple agencies respond to assist. The American Red Cross is right now at the Lowes on International Speedway Boulevard handing out tarps and water, and even providing meals to those who need it. We've had a lot of volunteer groups come forward. We've had the Florida Baptist Disaster Relief folks; we've had two groups, the Red Cross and also our COAD Community Organizations Active in Disaster. They are already set up right now working out of the United Way office and they are also going to coordinate the volunteer response. So, if you are interested in volunteering contact the

local United Way office and they will get you set up to be able to provide some assistance to those residents who could use some help.

And, with that, let me introduce Ben Bartlett, Director of Volusia County Road and Bridge.

Ben Bartlett – Director, Road and Bridge Division for Volusia County

Thank you Jim. Based on what we have seen there has been significant damage to a portion of unincorporated Volusia County as well as incorporated DeLand, to both structures and maintained streets. We received the call to Road and Bridge at approximately 4:00 o'clock of a possible tornado in the DeLand area. Our teams responded immediately and have basically been working ever since to clear the roads, make them safe for power crews and everybody to get in there and start the cleanup operations.

Duke Energy, their make ready crews, responded immediately as well and we paired them with our Road and Bridge crews and went to work clearing roads; clearing trees that were wrapped in power lines. It was a very efficient exercise as well as working closely with the Public Works of the City of DeLand, as well as representatives from the DOT due to the damage on Woodland Boulevard.

Our Road and Bridge crews, as well as city crews, worked to about midnight last night clearing roads, making them passable, and we've been back at it today, addressing dangerous hangers and leaners, limbs, and anything that might be or present a hazard to anybody on the roadways.

While the damage is significant we are working with State agencies to determine whether we are eligible for future assistance. Some of that, obviously what we are going have to be addressing the future is debris. I'd like to talk a little bit about what as homeowners and residents you can do with your debris.

You have many options for removal or disposal. You can load it up, take it to the landfill and take it to the certified place that will take that material. If you hire a contractor, you need to make sure that that contractor removes that debris from the site and does not put it on the side of the road. We also ask that debris be separated; vegetative debris versus construction debris. It is very important that we get helped out with that.

And also I'd like to put out a warning about hiring contractors. You need to make sure that contractor is licensed and they are insured and that you are not going to get scammed. There is a lot of that goes on when we have some of these disaster events.

Also, with power outages, generators are being used, and you need to make sure that those generators are being used properly; they are outside; they are away from your house, as carbon monoxide poisoning is a very dangerous thing. Also, we need to make sure that those generators are not being back fed into the electrical grid, because that could present dangers for our crews who are out there trying to clear trees and help restore power.

We know this is a challenging time, all these disasters are. We are extremely proud of our public works team, our road and bridge response, the City of DeLand's public works response, as well as the representatives from the State Department of Transportation as well as Duke Energy. We are going to be moving forward with debris operations very soon and we are hoping to get as much of the debris off the roads, out of the right of ways, as soon as possible, obviously with some potential storm events going on in DeLand.

That is all I have and I'd like to introduce DeLand City Manager, Michael Pleus.

Michael Pleus - City Manager for the City of DeLand

Good afternoon everyone. First and foremost I just want to say that our thoughts and prayers are with all of the victims of this tornado. As I drive around there are a lot of people that are displaced from their homes. The City of DeLand and the County of Volusia have worked very well together and we are going to be with our residents through the end of this crisis to make sure that we help them get back into their homes and get all of the debris removed.

I thought that I would give you a preliminary report, and keep in mind that this is preliminary, because we still can't get to some of the areas to do damage assessment. These numbers are really, the structures that were affected in the City of DeLand, although as I mentioned, the storm affected the unincorporated County around DeLand as much as it did the incorporated area of DeLand. But, we are looking at 28 total structures that were affected; 24 with minor damage; 20 with major damage and one that was completely destroyed. As soon as we have the numbers from the County I will share those along with the actual damage assessment numbers in terms of the dollar amounts of the damage.

I did want to say that for residents of the City of DeLand, as they are trying to get their roof repaired, and other things, we are waiving permit fees, and our permit staff is here to help you navigate that process. And so we will be here with you for that.

Last thing I wanted to mention is that we had a few thousand people sign up for Alert DeLand to help our residents know when these kinds of storms are coming our way, so I would encourage you to go on our website Deland.org, to sign up for Alert DeLand.

And with that I'm going to turn it over to our Mayor, Bob Apgar.

Robert Apgar – Mayor for the City of DeLand

Thank you Michael. The first thing I want to say is our primary concern has been our citizens. Not just the citizens of DeLand, but those in unincorporated Volusia County. Our hearts and feelings go out to them and we are here to help them restore normalcy as quickly as we possibly can. Almost immediately after the storm event, the City and County were on the scene in providing assistance clearing roads and things of that nature as you've heard. And, I can't say enough about the teamwork between Volusia County and the City of DeLand. The effort was seamless. They had one goal, was to clear the roads, get the power lines taken care of and planned out what people needed help, and make the damage assessment.

Additionally, at the same time, almost immediately, the American Red Cross was on site. They are currently at the Lowe's shopping area providing relief there. There is also additional aid available through the United Way of Volusia County, and you can contact either of them for further assistance.

The last think that I would like to say is DeLand is a very caring community. And, again, starting last night and through today I've seen constant offers of help, "What can I do to help my fellow man," "What can I do to help the citizens of our community?" And, that is what DeLand is all about. It is about helping others and being a very caring community, so to all of those people that have been out helping the neighbors, "Thank you" for being willing to step forward and help those in need. Again, we are doing everything we can to get people back to a normal way of life as quickly as we can, but there are certainly challenges for all of us in getting that, and we just ask for patience as we go through that process. Thank you again and I'll turn it back to Kevin.

Kevin Captain – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

Thank you Mayor Apgar. Before we take questions, Road and Bridge Director Ben Bartlett has a couple of other things that he'd like to mention about solid waste.

Ben Bartlett – Director, Road and Bridge Division for Volusia County

Thanks Kevin. Today would have been garbage collection for a lot of our unincorporated residents in Volusia County, and obviously the waste hauler that collects that garbage couldn't get in a lot of these streets today. So, we just wanted everybody to know that FCC Environmental Services plans to sweep the affected areas Saturday morning, August 22nd, so if you can get your normal household trash out to the curb on Saturday morning, they will come and pick it up.

Also we encourage, obviously there is a lot of garbage cans and totes that were destroyed in the storm, or lost. You can call this phone number 386-943-7889 to request a replacement can. Thank you.

Kevin Captain – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

Thank you Ben. We can go ahead and take questions. Are there any questions for Jim Judge from the Division of Emergency Management? Any for Ben Bartlett of Road and Bridge? Do we have any questions at all from the audience?

Question 1: I just wanted verification. I understand Mr. Judge said that there was only one person displaced from their home, actually, what did he say about people who were displaced from their homes? (Kevin: I will have Jim Judge answer that question.)

Jim Judge - Director, Emergency Management for Volusia County

Would you mind repeating that question? **Question 1:** I heard that one person was displaced so I was just wanting verification; is that the fact or not?

Answer 1: Yes, we had one individual who was homeless and he needed a place to stay, so we worked with him and the Red Cross, and they were able to put up that individual up in a hotel. And, then we did

have one injury that was transported by Volusia County Emergency Medical Services, and that was non-life-threatening.

Question 2: Was that the injury that took place near the Waffle House?

Answer 2: I don't have the location.

Kevin Captain – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

Okay, thank you sir. Any other questions from the media?

Question 3: Just in regards to what Michael was saying, you said that there were 28 total structures damaged, but I missed the part where you said how many were major and how many were minor?

Michael Pleus - City Manager for the City of DeLand

Answer 3: Yes, we had 28 struck, and this was in the City of DeLand, so we'll have to get you the County numbers. 24 that were minor, 20 that were major. And, just to follow on to Mr. Judge's comment, a lot of those major damaged structures are probably going to end up displacing the residents while the work goes on. A lot of them had pretty substantial damage. Thank you.

Question 4: One question; I know it's only been 23 hours; I'm sure there will be a debrief on all of this later on, but is there anything that jumps out to anybody that should have been done differently, could have been done differently, would have been done better? Anybody notice anything? I mean the response was very good, admittedly.

Answer 4: I'd decided that with all of the storms that we've worked together over the years with the County; it was seamless, and I am very pleased and proud about that. You know, because it was a joint city and county event, the Sheriff's Office did take over Incident Command up at the CVS, but we were constantly working together constantly keeping each other in the loop on what each other was doing and helping each other out. So, from my perspective I thought it went off well.

Ben Bartlett – Director, Road and Bridge Division for Volusia County

Obviously the past few years we've been through a lot of hurricane events, so in some ways this is similar, we just didn't have 48 hours to prepare, we had four minutes to prepare. But, we worked well

with our counterparts in the City of DeLand. Woodland Avenue which is a State road, was severely affected, DOT showed up, Duke Energy was on the spot. We've gone through these events enough to know how, what's the best way to get these roads cleared, to get the power on. And, working with Duke Energy, pairing their crews with our crews, we can't move trees off of roads unless we know the power is de-energized. And, they can't repair the power unless the trees are off the road. So, we work well together. Every summer, every hurricane season we go through all of our checklists and all of our contacts, and update them. And, we just went through a dry run with Isaias a couple of weeks ago, so in a lot of ways we were prepared, it was just a matter of mobilizing the equipment and manpower to get here. And, basically by midnight, the City and the County had almost all of our roads passable, at least for one way. So, I thought everything went well.

Question 5: Any message for the citizens out there, as far, either in the County or the City, as far as -- I was out here and there were a lot of people who came out to see what was going on, which is the natural inclination, but is there anything that the citizens can do to help you out?

Jim Judge - Director, Emergency Management for Volusia County

Answer 5: Absolutely, citizens helping citizens, neighbors helping neighbors, but also right now there is debris out there, so be careful. We don't want to see a lot of injuries happen after the event. It's just like with after a hurricane; chain saw injuries, carbon monoxide problems, and all those things are real. So, we just want everyone to take their time, be careful, we've got volunteer groups that are coming in and will be able to provide assistance to the homeowners, the businesses, to help them move that debris to the side of the road so that it can be picked up. Take your time, be safe, we are going to get out there and everybody is going to pitch in to help get the community back in shape.

Question 6: Mr. Judge, I know that you have crews doing preliminary assessment at the scene right now, we heard, you told us that part of the tornado was 500 feet wide. Are you at this point able to tell maybe where the core area of this storm was?

Answer 6: You know, they did discuss this with the National Weather Service. Let me turn this over to you Mike, I think you know.

Michael Pleus - City Manager for the City of DeLand

Answer 6 (continued): There were two kind of hard hit areas that started out on the west side of town over near Hazen Road and ended up near Lake Lindley, but the two core parts were up at Plymouth and

Stone on that area around the cemetery and it kind of strengthened and hit where Burger King is and then that whole area to the east side of Woodland Boulevard, north of Plymouth is the hardest hit area, between residential and business.

Question 7: Will that include the Pine Street, east Washington border?

Answer 7: Yes, it would.

Kevin Captain – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

Any other questions? Okay, with that I would like to give thanks to the City of DeLand. The County very much appreciates to be able to do this press conference here at the City Hall Chambers. So, thank you City Manager Pleus, and PIO Chris Graham, and Mayor Apgar, and we also want to thank the Volusia County Sheriff's Office and the public agencies, Duke Energy and all of our partners. With that, I'd like to close this conference. Take care, stay safe and help your neighbors.