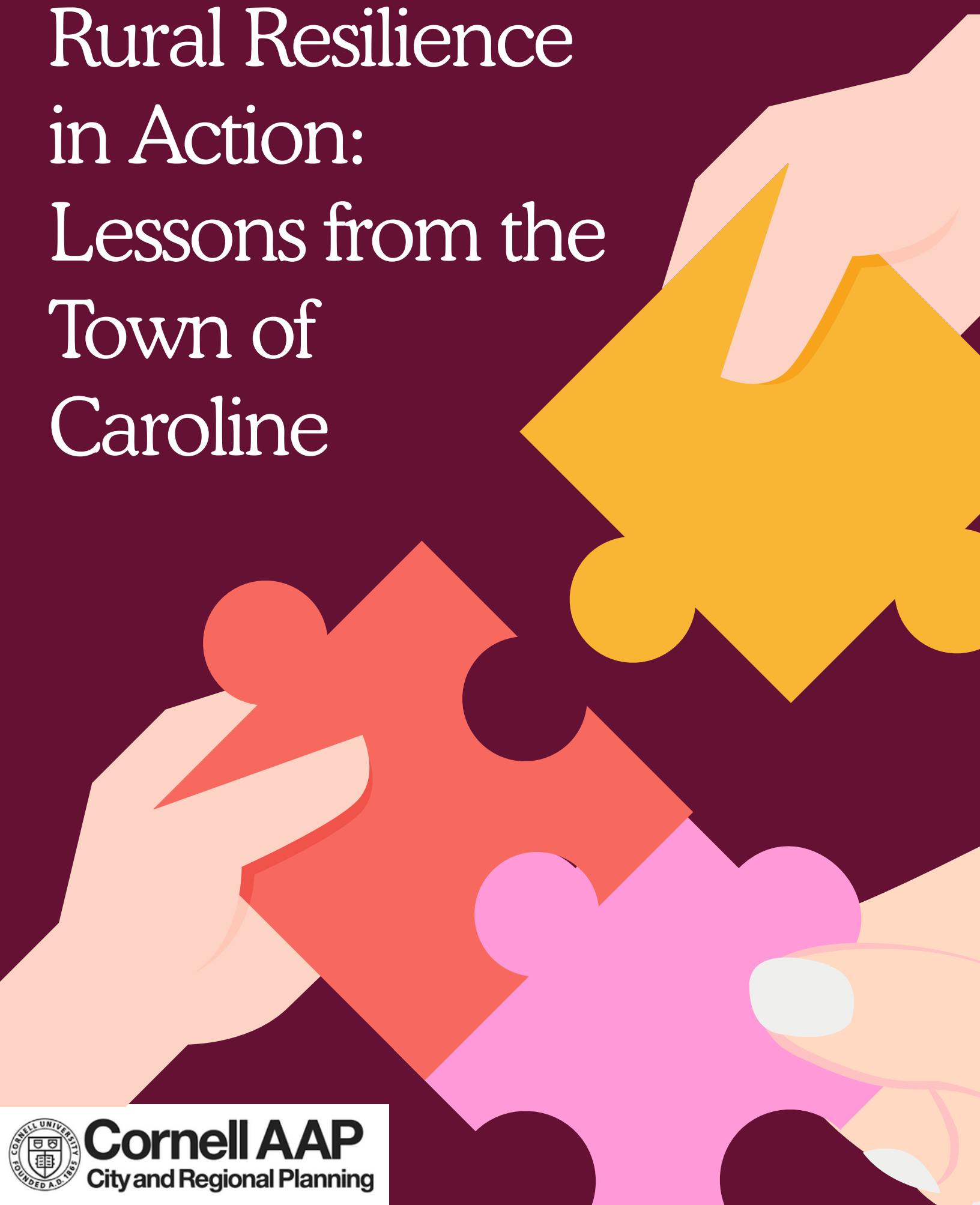


# Rural Resilience in Action: Lessons from the Town of Caroline



This report was completed under the guidance of Dr. Mildred E. Warner in the Department of City and Regional Planning at Cornell University. Initiatives were coordinated in partnership with Beth Harrington on behalf of the Emergency Preparedness working group in Town of Caroline.

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**Date:** December 15, 2025

**Online Access:** <https://labs.aap.cornell.edu/node/1144>



**Cornell AAP**  
City and Regional Planning

# Situating Rural Resilience in Planning Practice

Planning theory highlights that the idea of resilience in a rural context is rarely achieved through single programs or formal plans. Instead, it emerges through relationships, informal coordination, and the ability of local actors to adapt existing systems over time.<sup>1,2</sup>

Existing age-friendly planning frameworks highlight domains such as transportation, housing, social participation, emergency preparedness, and access to services as interconnected rather than discrete.<sup>3</sup> Yet in practice, rural communities often address these areas unevenly, responding first to immediate needs while leaving longer-term coordination and institutionalization underdeveloped. This tension between responsiveness and durability is a recurring theme in age-friendly and rural planning research. The concept of aging in place further complicates this picture. While aging in one's community is widely understood as a positive outcome, it requires reliable systems of care, communication, and emergency response across routine and crisis conditions.<sup>4,5</sup> In rural settings, these systems are frequently embedded in informal networks, raising questions about visibility, access, and continuity as community needs evolve.

Research on collaborative governance and networked service delivery suggests that such informal arrangements can be highly effective in resource-constrained environments, particularly when trust and shared norms are strong.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the literature cautions that collaboration without clear structure can lead to uneven participation, reliance on a small number of individuals, and challenges in sustaining effort over time. Recent work on care infrastructure and social reproduction further expands the understanding of resilience by emphasizing the everyday systems that support caregiving, social connection, and well-being.<sup>7,8</sup> This perspective shifts attention from emergency response alone to the ongoing practices that make collective action possible in moments of stress.

Together, these strands of literature suggest that rural resilience is best understood as a process marked by both strengths and tensions. The sections that follow examine how these dynamics play out in the Town of Caroline, illustrating how locally grounded practices align with established planning frameworks while also revealing areas where additional coordination, visibility, or support may strengthen future efforts.

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. *Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide*. World Health Organization, 2007. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241547307>.

<sup>2</sup> Warner, Mildred E. "Multigenerational Planning: Theory and Practice." *iQuaderni di Urbanistica Tre*, no. 14 (Sept–Dec 2017). [https://labs.aap.cornell.edu/sites/aap-labs/files/2025-11/MultiGenPlanning%20Quaderni\\_14\\_warner.pdf](https://labs.aap.cornell.edu/sites/aap-labs/files/2025-11/MultiGenPlanning%20Quaderni_14_warner.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> American Planning Association. *Aging in Community Policy Guide*. 2014. Accessed December 15, 2025. <https://www.planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/agingincommunity.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Greenhouse, Emily, George Hornsby, and Mildred E. Warner. *Multigenerational Planning: Linking the Needs of Children and Elders*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2010. [https://labs.aap.cornell.edu/sites/aap-labs/files/2022-09/Greenhouse%20et.al\\_2010.pdf](https://labs.aap.cornell.edu/sites/aap-labs/files/2022-09/Greenhouse%20et.al_2010.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Warner, Mildred E., and Xue Zhang. "Planning Communities for All Ages." *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 42, no. 4 (March 2019): 554–567. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X19828058>.

<sup>6</sup> Zhang, Xue, and Mildred E. Warner. "Cross-Agency Collaboration to Address Rural Aging: The Role of County Government." *Journal of Aging and Social Policy* 36, no. 2 (2023): 302–324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08959420.2023.2230088>.

<sup>7</sup> Binet, Andrew, Rebecca Houston-Read, Vedette Gavin, et al. "The Urban Infrastructure of Care: Planning for Equitable Social Reproduction." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 89 (September 2022): 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2022.2099955>.

<sup>8</sup> Arigoni, Danielle. *Climate Resilience for an Aging Nation*. Island Press, 2023.

# Understanding Rural Resilience



**Rural Resilience Framework** illustrating economic, social, environmental, governance, and learning dimensions. Authors' original synthesis, inspired by the Resilient Virginia framework.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Resilient Virginia. *Resilient Virginia's 2021–2026 Strategic Plan*. January 9, 2015 <https://resilientvirginia.org/our-strategic-plan/>.



# Rural Towns: Lived Realities and Pressing Challenges

In 2019, Tompkins County Office for the Aging published a Needs Assessment report where nearly three quarters of respondents said that being lonely or socially isolated is a problem for older adults in their community.<sup>1</sup> Challenges in civic and social engagement, older adult services, and social isolation are more pronounced in rural areas, which may not have the proximity or accessibility to community facilities or services and may experience resource or capacity constraints.<sup>2</sup>

During emergencies (i.e., power outages, snow storms, water scarcity), these challenges are exacerbated. Geographic remoteness makes it challenging to get help quickly, and unstable forms of communication (lack of cell/internet connectivity) create barriers to staying informed about disasters and contacting for help. With small budgets and limited staffing, there is shortage of people who can respond and bring help.<sup>3</sup>

While rural towns have unique challenges, they also have unique assets and solutions. A Cornell AAP report on Age-Friendly Public Services highlighted the potential of public service facilities (i.e., libraries and fire companies) to be welcoming central gathering places to reduce social isolation for older adults in Tompkins County.<sup>2</sup> Rural residents often strike a balance between independence and interdependence, leaning on their neighbors for practical help, emotional support, and information. If done well, this basis of community life can foster a sense of collectiveness and boost residents' ability to face difficulties together.<sup>4</sup>

To further explore how rural towns address social isolation and prepare for emergencies, this report builds upon the work done by Cornell AAP Local Government Restructuring Lab<sup>5</sup> and looks specifically at how Caroline, a small town in Tompkins County, took steps to build resiliency by leveraging the fire station and partnering with local organizations.

<sup>1</sup> Horn, L., and Horn Research LLC. *Needs Assessment, Summary Report*. Tompkins County, NY: Tompkins County Office for the Aging, 2019.

<https://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files/assets/county/v/1/office-for-the-aging/documents/cofa-2019-needs-assessment-report-final.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Local Government Restructuring Lab. *Age-Friendly Public Services: Rethinking Libraries & Fire Companies in Rural Tompkins County*. Fall 2023.

<https://labs.aap.cornell.edu/node/924>.

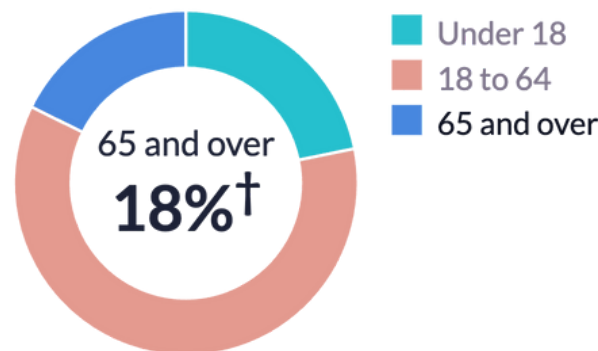
<sup>3</sup> Rural Health Information Hub. *Rural Emergency Preparedness and Response Overview*. May 14, 2025. <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/emergency-preparedness-and-response>.

<sup>4</sup> *Lifestyle → Sustainability Directory → Glossary*. Accessed December 15, 2025. <https://lifestyle.sustainability-directory.com/>.

<sup>5</sup> Local Government Restructuring Lab. *Local Government Restructuring Lab*. Accessed December 15, 2025. <https://labs.aap.cornell.edu/local-government-restructuring-lab>.

# The town of Caroline is **thinking ahead**, preparing the community to adapt to emergencies.

The Town of Caroline is a community in upstate New York, home to just over 3,000 people. Caroline is not defined not by a single center but by a constellation of small hamlets—Brooktondale, Slaterville Springs, Speedsville, and Caroline—spread across rolling farmland and forested hills. A significant proportion is older adults: 17.7% are 65+ years old.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Selected demographic characteristics of the Town of Caroline.

Over the years, community members have self-organized into both social groups and working committees centered around shared spaces like the volunteer fire department and Brooktondale Community Center. When strategizing about emergency preparedness in the town, committees and leaders are using places that already anchor the community as emergency sites.

**This report highlights resilience initiatives that are low-cost and initiated by residents of the town. They are easy to implement; it just takes a group of caring and motivated residents to operationalize and make things happen.** Let's learn from Caroline's small but mighty efforts to make more towns resilient.

# **The Importance of Collective Action During Emergencies**

# 2025 was a year of preparation for Caroline.

Beth Harrington, on behalf of Caroline's Emergency Preparedness working group, connected with Dr. Mildred Warner and students in Cornell's Architecture, Art, and Planning program. Students partnered with the working group on **3 major initiatives** in fall 2025:

1. **Survey** Caroline residents to understand their needs and worries related to emergencies, and take stock if they are willing to help in an emergency situation.
2. Develop and distribute a **Resource Brochure** with quick access numbers to get support locally during an emergency.
3. Speak with leaders running **local community groups** that help make Caroline more resilient and understand what lessons can be learned.



Cornell Architecture, Art, and Planning students with Beth Harrington  
*Photo by: Grace Chow*

**Step 1** in preparing residents for emergencies was to take stock of their needs and assets: what emergencies were most concerning, how they could get important information with limited internet, and what skills they had to help in an emergency. The survey was designed in collaboration with the working group, who provided insight in narrowing down a longer survey to five focused questions. Surveys were done in-person at the 2025 Brooktondale Apple Fest and distributed online, gathering a total of 60 responses.

# What were the main findings of the survey?

1

**Caroline residents are most worried about power outages.**

Snowstorms, water scarcity, and falls at home come in after that at. Upon probing, we learned that power outages in the winter are particularly concerning for residents that don't have generators, who are left in the cold. Without a neighbor or friend to call, their house can drop to below freezing temperatures.

2

**People are most willing to receive text messages for emergency communication.**

Getting emergency information out to people in rural areas with limited internet/cell connection is tricky, but most residents are open to using their phones.

3

**83% of respondents are willing to help in an emergency situation.**

This shows that residents are open to helping their neighbors! Many people reported being willing to use their cars to help transport others, phone or visit a neighbor, lend their generators, and help with elder/child care.

This **strengths-based survey** gave residents a chance to voice their concerns but also to be solution-oriented, taking stock of their abilities and resources to help. Many respondents voluntarily shared their contact information to help emergency response efforts.

# Resource Brochure

**Step two** of preparing for an emergency was developing a Resource Brochure to hand out so residents have quick access numbers to call in a crisis. Prior to this brochure, resources were listed in an unorganized manner: in email inboxes, on different websites, through word of mouth. This brochure, designed by the Cornell students, consolidates key local resources for warming/cooling centers, food scarcity, and other emergency numbers. Copies will be printed and distributed at key locations (fire station, community center, churches, markets) for residents to take.

## Town of Caroline Emergency Resources

911

Immediate Emergency Response:  
police, fire, or medical emergencies.

211

Quick connect to local services:  
housing, food, crisis support, health programs.



For any questions or comments about this brochure,  
contact Slaterville Fire Station (607-539-6233). Distributed 2026.

### Who you gonna call?

Having go-to neighborhood contacts ensures you  
always have someone to call in a pinch—and  
someone to look out for.

 NEIGHBORHOOD  
CONTACT #1

 NEIGHBORHOOD  
CONTACT #2

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

Take small steps to  
prepare for  
emergencies.  
[www.do1thing.com](http://www.do1thing.com)



Get community alerts  
straight to your  
phone, text, or inbox!



## EMERGENCY QUICK GUIDE



### POWER OUTAGES

**Emergencies:** 911 (downed lines/fires)  
**NYSEG:** 800-572-1131 or [nyseg.com/outages](http://nyseg.com/outages).  
Register life-sustaining medical equipment for  
priority. See [www.nyseg.com/safety/stormsafety](http://www.nyseg.com/safety/stormsafety)  
**Prep:** Charge phones, stock food/water  
**Alerts:** NY-Alert | Tompkins Emergency Response



### FLOODING

**Emergencies:** 911  
**Emergency Housing:** DSS 607-274-5030  
**Red Cross:** 716-886-7500 | [redcross.org/flood](http://redcross.org/flood)  
**Prep:** Check flood maps, move valuables up, buy  
flood insurance  
**Alerts:** NOAA Weather Radio



### SNOW STORMS

**Emergencies:** 911  
**Road issues:** Highway Dept.  
**Prep:** Stock 3-day food/water, blankets, car kit.  
**Energy Help:** LIHEAP Winter Aid  
**Alerts:** [weather.gov/nwr](http://weather.gov/nwr)



### FALLS

**Emergencies:** 911  
**Prep:** Remove tripping hazards, add lighting & grab  
bars.  
**Support:** Tompkins County Office for the Aging  
607-274-5482

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES



### EMERGENCY SHELTER

A temporary safe location in disasters.  
**When:** As needed. See Tompkins Ready website.  
**Location:** Caroline Elementary School  
2439 Slaterville Rd, Slaterville Springs  
**Call for info:** American Red Cross Tompkins County  
Chapter 607-273-1900



### CAROLINE FOOD PANTRY

Food distribution twice a month.  
**When:** 1st & 3rd Mondays • 5–7 PM  
**Location:** Old Fire Hall, 522 Valley Rd, Brooktondale  
**Pick-ups:** Based on last name, see  
[carolinefoodpantry.org](http://carolinefoodpantry.org)



### HEATING & COOLING CENTERS

Temperature-controlled space during extreme heat or  
cold.  
**When:** As needed. See Tompkins Ready website.  
**Locations:**  
• Brooktondale Community Center  
• Slaterville Volunteer Fire Company Fire Hall  
**Call for info:** American Red Cross Tompkins County  
Chapter 607-273-1900



### LOCAL CHURCHES

Caroline Valley Community Church  
Caroline Center Church  
St. Thomas Episcopal Church  
Saint John's Episcopal Church

Printable version (8.5x11) listed in Appendix.

# Learning From Community-Led Solutions



Rural communities across the U.S. face many challenges, including:

- Limited emergency services, often run by volunteers (fire responders, hospitals)
- Geographic isolation and difficult terrain
- Higher proportions of older adults with limited mobility
- Fragile power grids vulnerable to storms
- Limited broadband for alerts and communication
- Small municipal budgets

Caroline offers a window into the challenges and possibilities shared by many rural towns. By documenting resident-led bottom-up initiatives, this section captures practical lessons that might otherwise go unseen. Caroline demonstrates how low-cost, community-driven efforts can strengthen local resilience, offering models that other rural towns can adapt. The local leaders and organizations spotlighted in this section show these lessons in action.



**Beth Harrington**  
Local leader, volunteer  
fire fighter



**Ben Hogben &  
Tena Tavelli**  
Caroline Valley and  
Caroline Center Church,  
Pastor & Associate Pastor



**Doris Green**  
New York State Caregiving  
and Respite Coalition,  
Director



**Aly Evans**  
Foodnet Meals on Wheels,  
Executive Director



# Caroline Seniors Group

## Friendship is Always on the Menu

Rurality and aging are widely recognized as contributing factors to social isolation, a persistent challenge in the Town of Caroline. Geographic distance, limited transportation, and changing health needs can make sustained social connection difficult, particularly for older adults. In response, a dedicated group known as the Caroline Seniors convenes monthly to foster connection through shared meals and conversation.<sup>1</sup>



A Caroline Seniors potluck gathering  
*Photo courtesy of Caroline Seniors*

These gatherings emphasize the simple yet meaningful practice of showing up for one another, nurturing relationships that span long-standing friendships and newer social ties. In addition to conversation, the group regularly invites community partners, including the Tompkins County Office for the Aging, the Statewide Senior Action Council, and the Finger Lakes Independence Center to share information on preventive health care, Medicare updates, and local support services.



Local residents at a Caroline Seniors gathering  
*Photo courtesy of Caroline Seniors*

Members of the Caroline Seniors are deeply community-minded and committed to mutual care. They coordinate rides to promote inclusion and collectively contribute small donations—often one dollar per meeting—which together funded the installation of wheelchair ramps at the Brooktondale Community Center. Several members' volunteerism has been recognized by the Tompkins County Office for the Aging through the Outstanding Volunteer awards.

At the same time, the group acknowledges the limits of its reach. Older adults who are homebound, immobile, or otherwise unable to attend in-person gatherings remain underserved, an ongoing gap in social connection. Addressing the needs of these less accessible residents is an area the group hopes to grow in. The Caroline Seniors demonstrate that community-based responses to rural social isolation are meaningful and require a lens of inclusion to reach as many as possible.

<sup>1</sup> Caroline Seniors. *Caroline Seniors*. n.d. Accessed December 15, 2025. <https://carolineseniors.weebly.com>

# Caregiver's Respite Program

## Pouring Into Those Who Pour Out

Securing reliable caregiving support for oneself or for an aging or dependent family member is often financially and emotionally demanding, particularly in rural communities such as Caroline, New York. Often times, caregivers in Caroline are adults balancing paid or unpaid care work alongside employment, household responsibilities, and their own health needs. Despite the essential nature of this labor, caregivers often experience economic strain, burnout, and limited access to support services.

The New York Caregiving & Respite Coalition, administered through Lifespan of Greater Rochester, addresses these gaps by operating community-based respite programs across New York State. These programs provide short-term, structured relief by allowing caregivers to leave their loved ones in a safe, supervised environment for up to four hours per week while they attend to personal, medical, or logistical needs. Volunteers provide individualized engagement through activities such as arts, music, and social interaction.

Caregiving roles vary widely and include both formal and informal arrangements. Caregivers may be family members, friends, neighbors, or paid professionals, and they span all age groups. According to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, approximately 30 percent of children nationally live in kinship foster care arrangements, where relatives serve as primary caregivers.<sup>1</sup> In other cases, younger individuals provide care for older family members. The Coalition's respite model is designed to support caregivers across age groups and disability contexts.

In Caroline, the respite program operates out of the Slaterville Fire Station, a trusted community hub that hosts multiple services. This co-location enables participants to access additional resources, including prepared meals through Foodnet. However, the program remains limited in scale. Doris Green, director of the New York Caregiving & Respite Coalition, identifies two persistent challenges in rural areas: delivering centralized services across dispersed populations and recruiting sufficient volunteers to sustain regular programming.

These challenges reflect broader structural constraints faced by Caroline, including limited transportation, volunteer capacity, and service funding. The respite program operates within these limitations, demonstrating how local institutions and community networks play a critical role in sustaining essential caregiving support where formal systems alone are insufficient.

Ms. Green emphasizes that strengthening caregiver support begins locally, through community awareness, volunteer engagement, and recognition of caregiving labor in all its forms. Supporting caregivers is not only a matter of appreciation, but a necessary investment in community resilience.

<sup>1</sup> New York State Office of Children and Family Services. *Kin-First*. n.d. Accessed December 15, 2025. <https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/fostercare/recruitment/strategies/kin-first.php>

# Caroline Churches

## A Bottom-Up Network of Care

In Caroline, faith-based institutions play a significant role in local social infrastructure. Beyond their religious functions, churches serve as informal centers of connection, friendship and exchange, and mutual support. For many community members, particularly those with limited mobility or smaller social networks, churches provide regular opportunities for social interaction, informal monitoring of well-being, and peer support.

Despite operating with limited financial and human resources, churches in Caroline consistently respond to local needs through small-scale, community-driven initiatives. At Caroline Center Church, a publicly accessible food cabinet operates on a neighbor-to-neighbor model, allowing individuals to contribute or access food as needed. Following Sunday services, shared refreshments often turn into communal meals, which can be an important source of nourishment and social connection for some attendees.



*Caroline Center Church members preparing for fish fry (first Friday every month)  
Photo courtesy of Susan Larkin*



*Congregation gathering at St. Thomas Episcopal Church (2024)  
Photo courtesy of Susan Larkin*

Caroline Valley Church hosts monthly discussions addressing aging-related topics such as cognitive health, fall prevention, and housing transitions. These sessions reflect an effort to respond to practical concerns identified within the congregation. Church leaders also described instances in which congregants mobilized rapidly to support neighbors experiencing unexpected hardship, such as organizing financial assistance for families facing emergency travel needs.

Pastor Ben Hogben of Caroline Valley Church emphasized that churches are well positioned to function as trusted gathering points during emergencies due to their established relational networks. However, he also noted ongoing challenges.<sup>1</sup> Congregations in Caroline tend to be small and aging, which limits volunteer availability and the capacity to sustain programs or respond during prolonged emergencies. These constraints reflect broader demographic and resource challenges faced by rural communities.

While churches in Caroline cannot meet all community needs, their continued presence and adaptability demonstrate how informal institutions contribute meaningfully to local resilience. Their role illustrates how community care persists even amid structural limitations, offering insight into the value of place-based social networks in rural contexts.

<sup>1</sup> Federal Emergency Management Agency. *Engaging Faith-Based and Community Organizations: Planning Considerations for Emergency Management*. Washington, DC: Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2018. <https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/engaging-faith-based-and-community-organizations.pdf>



# Slaterville Fire Station

## The Many Roles of a Fire Station

The Slaterville Fire Station plays a central role in Caroline's community life, functioning as more than an emergency response facility. In addition to serving as a 911 dispatch center, it hosts Meals on Wheels deliveries, a weekly caregiver respite program, social dining, and resident-led working group meetings. When new programs or initiatives are proposed, local leaders often recommend the Fire Station as a host site, reflecting its long-standing role as a trusted and geographically central place in a spread-out rural town.



*Slaterville Volunteer Fire Company building (2024)*  
Photo courtesy of Susan Larkin



*Caroline Seniors sharing a meal at the Fire Company (2025)*  
Photo courtesy of Susan Larkin

This multifunctional use reflects both intentional planning and practical necessity. Caroline, like many rural communities, faces challenges related to distance, limited transportation options, and a small number of public facilities capable of hosting programs. By consolidating services at the Fire Station, the town improves accessibility and helps residents stay connected despite these constraints. Research on age-friendly public services in Tompkins County similarly identifies fire stations as effective community hubs in rural settings because of their visibility, trust, and existing infrastructure.<sup>1</sup>

Day-to-day operations rely on a small volunteer force of approximately ten individuals, many of whom are later-career or retired community members. Their commitment makes both emergency response and community programming possible. At the same time, this reliance highlights ongoing concerns around long-term sustainability, succession planning, and capacity, particularly as use of the facility continues to expand without corresponding growth in staffing or funding. Town leaders have acknowledged the need to broaden participation, including creating roles beyond emergency response, such as administrative support, logistics, and facilities management.

Taken together, the Fire Station's integrated functions align with emergency management principles that emphasize trusted local institutions and community-based preparedness, as well as aging-in-place strategies that support residents in remaining safely in their homes. By layering everyday services with emergency readiness, Caroline illustrates how rural communities adapt familiar, trusted infrastructure to meet evolving needs while working within real and persistent constraints.

<sup>1</sup> Zhang, Chenming, Kanij Fateema, and Kathy Lim. *Age-Friendly Public Services: Rethinking Libraries & Fire Companies in Rural Tompkins County*. Ithaca, NY: Local Government Restructuring Lab, Cornell University College of Architecture, Art, and Planning, 2023. <https://labs.aap.cornell.edu/node/924>

# Foodnet Meals on Wheels

## A County Program Finds a Home in Caroline

Rural communities across upstate New York experience ongoing challenges related to food access, transportation, economic insecurity, and social isolation. These conditions shape everyday life for residents who live alone, at a distance from services, or without reliable transportation. In such contexts, maintaining nutrition security and regular opportunities for social connectedness can be difficult.<sup>1</sup>

Foodnet Meals on Wheels of Tompkins County operates within this environment, providing community-based nutritional services alongside opportunities for social engagement to residents across the county. For more than three decades, Foodnet has offered three core services: home-delivered meals, community dining programs, and nutrition counseling supported by an on-staff registered dietitian. Approximately 350 county residents receive a hot meal at home each day, including individuals living along the Brooktondale–Caroline route.



*Meals from Foodnet  
Photo courtesy of Aly Evans*

Community dining is one part of Foodnet's service delivery model. At the Slaterville Volunteer Fire Company, the program began with a small group of participants and now brings together approximately 30 residents in 2025. Participation has developed through familiar, place-based channels like neighbors inviting neighbors, notices in faith-based newsletters, and outreach by local organizations such as Love Living at Home, rather than through centralized enrollment or purpose-built facilities.

Each week, the Slaterville Fire Company serves as a regular gathering place where residents share a meal, exchange information, and stay connected. Participants often note the value of physical accessibility and a setting that feels familiar and welcoming. Within this arrangement, Foodnet provides meals and nutrition oversight, while community members shape the social environment. This approach is consistent with public health research identifying nutrition security and social connectedness as key social determinants of health, particularly in rural contexts where trusted local institutions play an important role in service delivery.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Social Determinants of Health: Know What Affects Health. 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants>.

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization. *Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide*. World Health Organization, 2007. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-WKC-2007-003>.

# Strengthening Resilience Through Local Collaboration

The initiatives documented in this report illustrate that community resilience in Caroline has emerged not solely from formal county or municipal planning processes, but from locally driven efforts shaped by residents, volunteers, and trusted institutions responding to shared needs. These bottom-up practices demonstrate how, in a small rural town, systems of care are often built incrementally through relationships, local knowledge, and sustained collaboration rather than through centralized infrastructure alone.

At the same time, these efforts operate within clear constraints. Caroline faces challenges common to many rural communities, including limited staffing and volunteer capacity, geographic dispersion, uneven access to transportation, and reliance on a small number of individuals and facilities to deliver essential services. As emergencies become more frequent and complex, these constraints underscore the importance of strengthening coordination and continuity across existing programs.

Several areas warrant continued attention. These include engaging a broader range of residents to support volunteer continuity, expanding outreach to individuals who may be socially isolated or not yet connected to existing networks, improving coordination among key community institutions such as the fire station, library, faith-based organizations, and food programs during both routine operations and emergency response, and building redundancy so that services do not depend disproportionately on any single person or organization.

Importantly, progress in these areas is already underway. Conversations among local organizations and resident-led identification of gaps reflect an ongoing process of collective problem-solving. While Caroline's experience does not eliminate the structural challenges facing rural communities, it offers insight into how local collaboration can enhance preparedness and responsiveness. With continued planning, documentation, and inclusive engagement, these efforts can inform future decision-making in Caroline and contribute to broader discussions on rural resilience.

# Appendix A: Community Emergency Preparedness Survey (Oct 2025)

## Safe & Sound Caroline - Working Group on Emergency Preparedness

How can Caroline be better prepared for emergencies? Your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous unless you choose to share your contact information with us.

*\*This survey is for residents of the town of Caroline. Check all that apply.*

### **1. Which types of emergencies worry you the most, or do you feel least prepared for?**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Falls at home  | <input type="checkbox"/> Power outages                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flooding       | <input type="checkbox"/> Heat waves                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Snowstorms     | <input type="checkbox"/> Wildfires  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Water scarcity | <input type="checkbox"/> I have not thought about emergency preparedness. |

### **2. How do you usually get information during an emergency?**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Radio                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Town or County alerts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social media (Facebook, X, etc.)        | <input type="checkbox"/> Siren                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Text or phone calls from family/friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Local TV channels     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neighbors checking in                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____          |

### **3. How would you prefer to get information about an emergency?**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Receive a text message       | <input type="checkbox"/> In-person check-in                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Receive a phone call         | <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook group                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Email chain                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Mailed or printed community newsletter/ newspaper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I prefer not to be contacted | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                                      |

### **4. What transportation do you have access to during an emergency?**

- |                                       |                                     |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> My own car   | <input type="checkbox"/> Snowmobile |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Truck        | <input type="checkbox"/> ATV        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Motorcycle   | <input type="checkbox"/> Tractor    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |                                     |

### **5. What kind of resources or skills do you have that could help others?**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can phone or visit a neighbor in need          | <input type="checkbox"/> I can help with child care and/or elder care            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am a handy person (electrician, plumber, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> I can give rides with my vehicle / other transportation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have a generator                               | <input type="checkbox"/> I am good with IT / tech                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can provide medical care                       | <input type="checkbox"/> I have animal care experience                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                                     |  |

### **6. Would you be willing to help in an emergency situation?**

- ☐ Yes, I am willing  
☐ No, I am not willing at this time

If you are willing to be contacted to help in an emergency situation, please provide your contact information.

## Appendix B: Emergency Preparedness Survey Methods & Results (Oct 2025)

**Survey Purpose:** With this survey, we wanted to take stock of Caroline residents 1) understanding how residents get their information in a rural context, 2) what emergencies are most worrying, and 3) taking stock of skills and willingness to help.

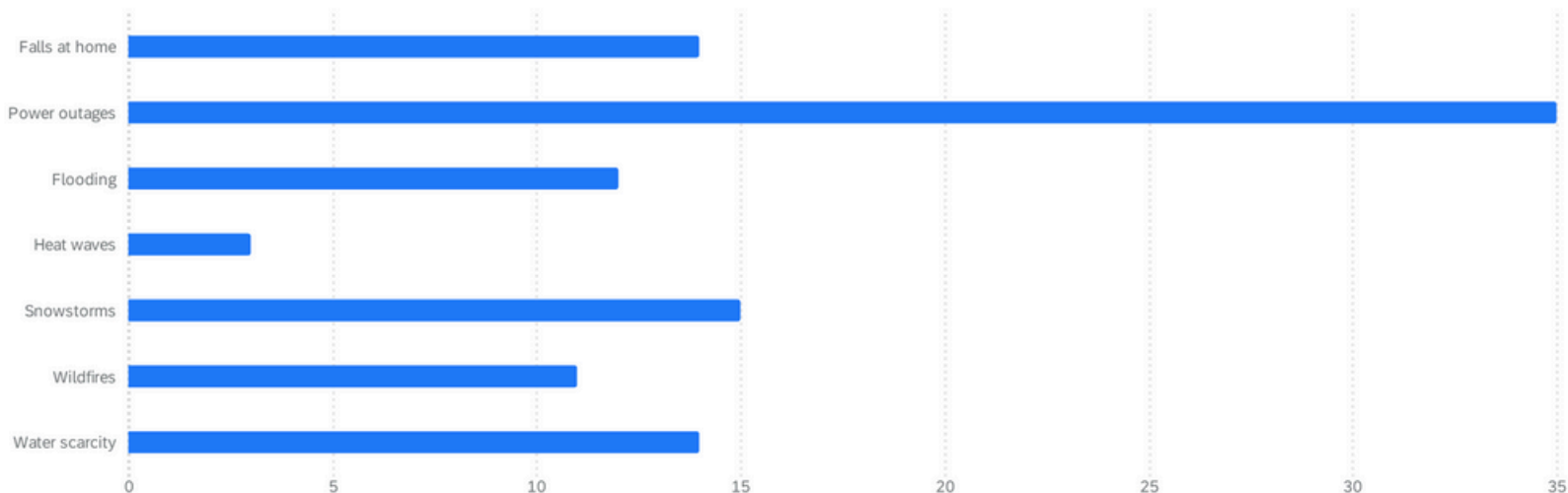
**Rising to the top:** Quickly emerging as a top priority question for the working group was: how do we get emergency information out to people in rural areas with limited internet/cell connection? In a participatory and collaborative way, working group members ranked their top 5 questions and proposed rephrasing.

**Methods:** We attended the Brooktondale Apple Fest on October 18 and surveyed residents with paper forms, gathering 44 responses in-person. We also pushed the survey online through Facebook and the town listserv, bringing our survey total to 60.

### Survey Results

**Question 1:** Caroline residents are most worried about power outages (55%+ respondents). Snowstorms, water scarcity, and falls at home came in after that at ~20%. Upon probing several residents, we learned that power outages in the winter are particularly concerning for residents that don't have generators, who are left in the cold. Without a neighbor or friend to call, their house can drop to below freezing temperatures.

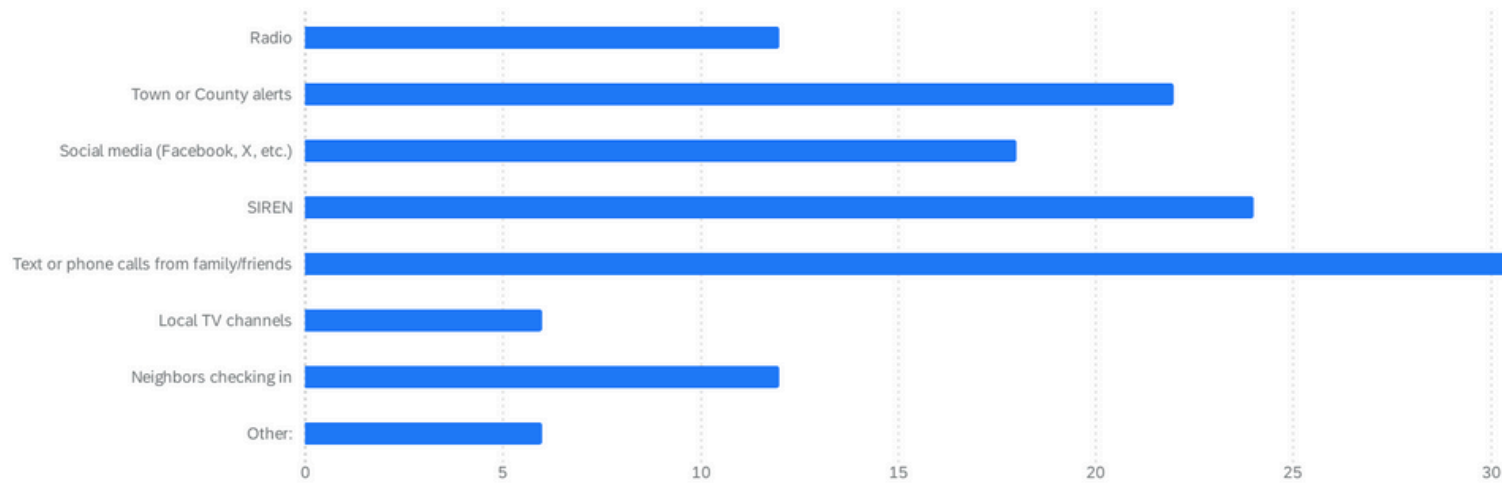
Q1: Which types of emergencies worry you the most, or do you feel least prepared for? Check all that apply. 56 ⓘ





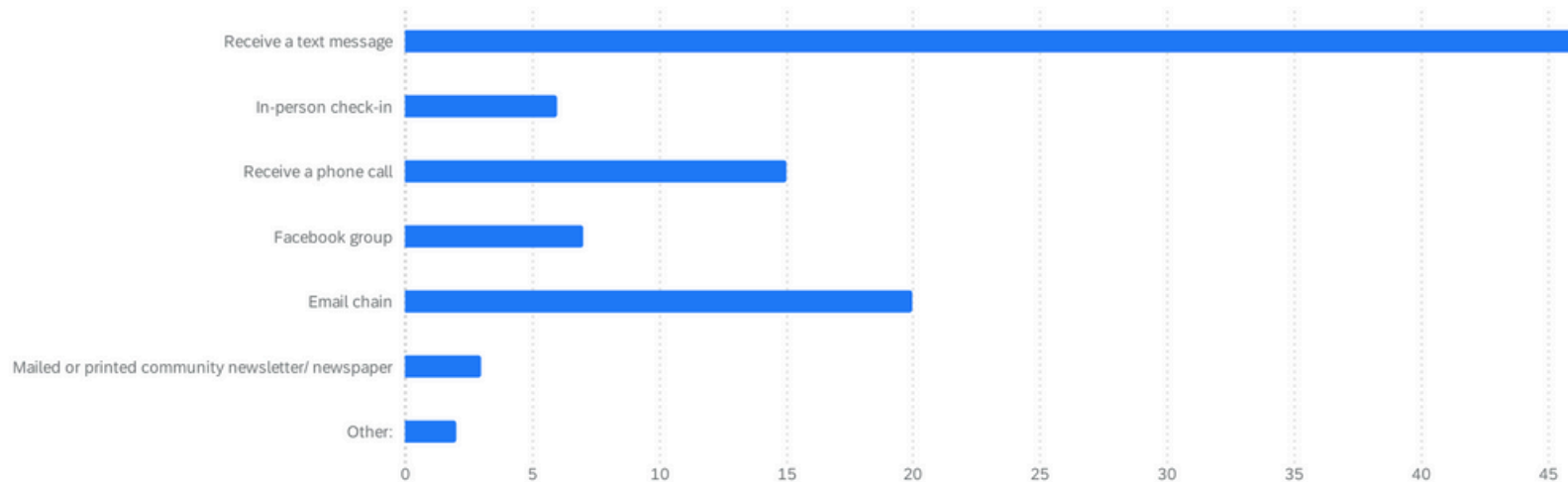
**Question 2:** Residents are most reliant on check-ins (text, phone call) from friends and family. Many knew SIREN, though this survey showed us there is room to promote SIREN sign-ups.

Q2: How do you usually get information during an emergency? Check all that appl... 55 ⓘ



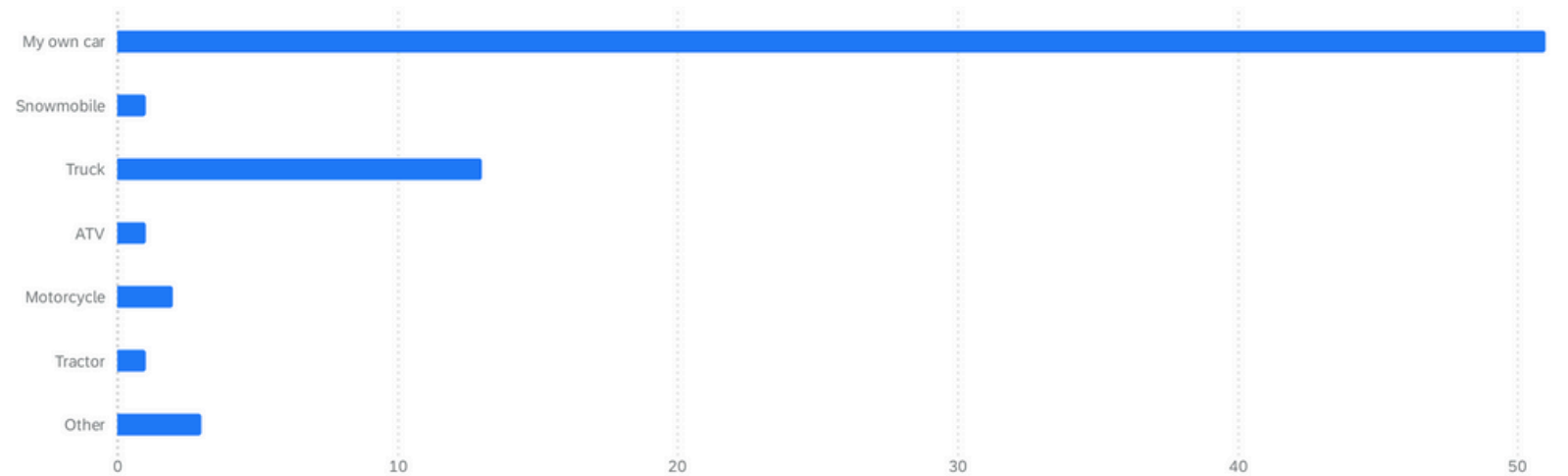
**Question 3:** Residents predominantly prefer hearing about emergencies through receiving a text message. 20 people are open to receiving email notifications.

Q3: How would you prefer to get information about an emergency? Check all that... 55 ⓘ

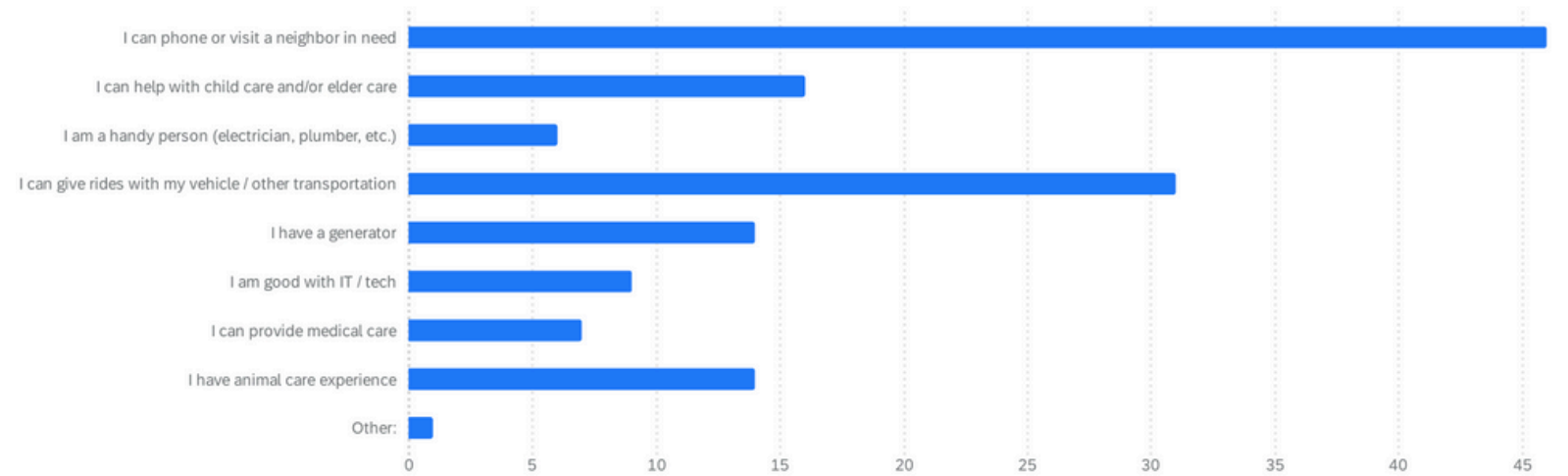


The next set of questions are designed to take stock of what resources residents have that would help in the event of an emergency (transportation **Question 4**; skills and resources **Question 5**) and whether they would be willing to help others in an emergency (**Question 6**).

Q4: What transportation do you have access to during an emergency? Check all th... 57 ⓘ



Q5: What kind of resources or skills do you have that could help others? Check... 56 ⓘ



We are pleasantly surprised to see that 83% of survey respondents are willing to help in an emergency situation, showing that generally Caroline is open to helping their neighbors. This is a great result, and we will explore what can facilitate connection and support between neighbors.

Q6: Would you be willing to help in an emergency situation? 54 ⓘ

Q6 - Would you be willing to help in an emergency situation?	Count	Count
Yes, I am willing	83%	45
No, I am not willing at this time	17%	9

## Appendix C: Resource Brochure

For any questions or comments about this brochure, contact Slaterville Fire Station (607-539-6233). Distributed 2026.

### Who you gonna call?

Having go-to neighborhood contacts ensures you always have someone to call in a pinch—and someone to look out for.



NEIGHBORHOOD  
CONTACT #1

NEIGHBORHOOD  
CONTACT #2



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

Take small steps to  
prepare for  
emergencies.  
[www.do1thing.com](http://www.do1thing.com)



Get community alerts  
straight to your  
phone, text, or inbox!



## Town of Caroline Emergency Resources

911

**Immediate Emergency Response:**  
police, fire, or medical emergencies.

211

**Quick connect to local services:**  
housing, food, crisis support, health  
programs.



## EMERGENCY QUICK GUIDE



### POWER OUTAGES

**Emergencies:** 911 (downed lines/fires)  
**NYSEG:** 800-572-1131 or [nyseg.com/outages](http://nyseg.com/outages).  
Register life-sustaining medical equipment for priority. See [www.nyseg.com/safety/stormsafety](http://www.nyseg.com/safety/stormsafety)  
**Prep:** Charge phones, stock food/water  
**Alerts:** NY-Alert | Tompkins Emergency Response



### FLOODING

**Emergencies:** 911  
**Emergency Housing:** DSS 607-274-5030  
**Red Cross:** 716-886-7500 | [redcross.org/flood](http://redcross.org/flood)  
**Prep:** Check flood maps, move valuables up, buy flood insurance  
**Alerts:** NOAA Weather Radio



### SNOW STORMS

**Emergencies:** 911  
**Road issues:** Highway Dept.  
**Prep:** Stock 3-day food/water, blankets, car kit.  
**Energy Help:** LIHEAP Winter Aid  
**Alerts:** [weather.gov/nwr](http://weather.gov/nwr)



### FALLS

**Emergencies:** 911  
**Prep:** Remove tripping hazards, add lighting & grab bars.  
**Fall prevention:** Tompkins County Office for the Aging 607-274-5482

\*Tompkins Ready website: [tompskinscountyny.gov/All-Departments/Emergency-Response/Tompkins-Ready](http://tompskinscountyny.gov/All-Departments/Emergency-Response/Tompkins-Ready)

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES



### EMERGENCY SHELTER

*A temporary safe location in disasters.*  
**When:** As needed. \*See Tompkins Ready website.  
**Location:** Caroline Elementary School  
2439 Slaterville Rd, Slaterville Springs  
**Call for info:** American Red Cross Tompkins County Chapter 607-273-1900



### CAROLINE FOOD PANTRY

*Food distribution twice a month.*  
**When:** 1st & 3rd Mondays • 5–7 PM  
**Location:** Old Fire Hall, 522 Valley Rd, Brooktondale  
**Pick-ups:** Based on last name, see [carolinefoodpantry.org](http://carolinefoodpantry.org)



### HEATING & COOLING CENTERS

*Temperature-controlled space during extreme heat or cold.*  
**When:** As needed. \*See Tompkins Ready website.  
**Locations:**

- Brooktondale Community Center
- Slaterville Volunteer Fire Company Fire Hall

**Call for info:** American Red Cross Tompkins County Chapter 607-273-1900



### LOCAL CHURCHES

*Emergency Numbers:*  
Caroline Valley Community Church: (607) 227-0336  
Caroline Center Church: (607) 227-0336  
St. Thomas Episcopal Church: (607) 227-5869  
Saint John's Episcopal Church: (607)-273-6532



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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**NUMBER:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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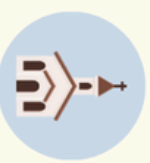
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*This report was completed under the guidance of Dr. Mildred E. Warner in the  
Department of City and Regional Planning at Cornell University.*

*Initiatives were coordinated in partnership with Beth Harrington on behalf of the  
Emergency Preparedness working group in Town of Caroline.*

*Online access of this report: <https://labs.aap.cornell.edu/node/1144>*