In the aftermath of nearby emergencies, cities find renewed focus on comprehensive planning for response and recovery.

ON FEBRUARY 28, 2001, the Nisqually earthquake shook the Puget Sound. One of the largest recorded earthquakes in Washington state history, it measured 6.8 on the Richter scale, lasted 45 seconds, and caused approximately $2 billion in damages.

Was Nisqually the Big One? Probably not; it could have been worse. But the quake provided scientists with insights into what’s likely to happen the next time the ground starts moving. And communities have stepped up their efforts to coordinate emergency planning.

Disasters are inherently local, and no community is immune. Whether they’re natural or human-caused, disasters happen in cities of all sizes, and citizens look to their local governments to lead the immediate response, guide the recovery, and reassure them that life will return to normal again. Preparation and response get the most attention, especially in high-risk areas, but preparing for the long-term recovery, when the situation is no longer getting worse, demands even more attention. And often the response and recovery efforts overlap.

Local leaders help their communities weather the ups and downs of recovery. They understand the pulse of their community and the pulse of their employees who may be leading the recovery process. They must balance ongoing public service expectations and long-term recovery needs with the vision that will keep the community moving forward.

When your world shakes, will you be ready?