

Moderators Report – Group 2

Date of Forum: July 15, 2013

Location of Forum: WHYY, Philadelphia, PA

Moderator name(s): Gwynne Smith Scheffer and Ted Enoch

Group Description: There were eleven participants in Group 2. The demographics of the group were as follows: Five white females and six white males; one shore resident who was displaced for five months and one Gladwyne resident with an investment property at the shore; two students, one from Pitt focusing on urban planning in the Mid-Atlantic region and one working in a Camden-based architecture firm on shore recovery project; two Philadelphia residents. Organizations represented were Dodge Foundation (NJ), Occupy Sandy (NJ), Occupy Philly (PA), non-profit arts focused on resilience and issues from Sandy (NYC), innovative design firm focused on public spaces (NYC), architecture firm (NJ). When asked what brought you to the forum, responses included: approaches to deal with super storms like Sandy, enjoys the shore, learn what citizens are saying to provide insights to advance work, proponents of a regional approach, what should we be doing, systems engineer looking for potential project work, concerned citizen because of manmade problems and environmental issues, has family and friends who go down to the shore.

Approach 1: Rebuild and Prepare

Pros:

- Cutting through the red tape of government (FEMA), NGOs, insurance companies
 - People have been out of houses too long
 - If your house was destroyed, people didn't know how to access the help they needed
 - No transportation to disaster recovery meeting – cars were red stickered and no bus service
 - Misinformation
 - Fear of FEMA
 - Undocumented residences
- Stakeholders, e.g., insurance companies, municipalities, working together
- Emergency communications before, during and after
 - Citizens will be better prepared
 - Instructions given but will people follow; citizens are part of the process
 - Each community should work on preparedness; everyone has to play together
 - People knew what to do and chose not to
 - Local communications are helpful when in place
- Success is dependent on the community
 - Business are open and back to normal or close to what they once were
 - Replenished beaches
- Putting money in the hands of the people (desired)
 - Local municipalities know best what they need
 - Responsibility to see how funds come through
 - Mismanagement of federal funds
 - Who facilities?
- Need a structure in place to ensure money goes where it's needed most
- Infrastructure – are they getting what they need timely
 - Dependent on which community you live in

Cons:

- Spotty coverage on local level
 - Need an overarching organization
 - Volunteer organizations active in disaster
 - State and National calls
 - Anyone in the system can be on calls but it took a while to get connected

- Adequate response of all stakeholders, e.g., police, construction (related to safety of structures), community, government
- On the Web
 - Ocean City community page
 - Lots of information
 - Impressed with how it was organized
 - New Jersey Transit, njtransit.com
 - What was/wasn't running
- How will people know where to find information
- Knee jerk reaction to rebuild
 - Short term get it down and open for the season – public relations and politics
 - Should not be rebuilt the same way
 - Exposure for reoccurrence
 - Redundancy
 - Set backs
 - Setting themselves up to pay more next time
 - More expense to rebuild in the future
 - Not worth to rebuild
 - Will happen again before mortgage is paid
 - Those displaced won't be able to rebuild again
 - Rebuild house but who will buy it
 - Increase in insurance premiums

Approach 2: Rethink and Adapt

Pros:

- Blends short-term and long-term thinking, helps with political reality and pressing needs.
- Let's find out where other sea-side, storm prone communities have had success mitigating risk: Maine? Japan? Southern States (Carolinas, Florida) Have Delaware and Maryland anything to tell us. What about Holland and their extensive history with flood mitigation.
- Bullet points of main pros and cons people discussed for this choice, tradeoffs discussed, points of tension, changes people would like to make to get them to support the choice.
- An inclusive process is vital in reforming any regulatory agency in this regard.
- We need real data to inform economic models and plans for long-term development guidance.
- How can we include architects and builders in code improvements for better buildings?
- We might be able to leverage current raised emotions to usher in long-term change. In any case, communication plans need to have emotional components to help achieve buy-in.
- This seems to be a strong community resilient option.

Cons:

- There is no consensus on storm frequency to create unified sense of need for greater changes begun to be outlined in this scenario...
- There was some doubt in this group that communities are able to think more holistically
- The more long-term resilient we plan our communities, the greater the changes (increased dunes, greater sea walls, houses on stilts) the more expensive short-term costs become, even if it mitigates long-term damages...
- There is a great pressure to get people back into homes NOW

Points of Tension:

- Can you work out the money? How will victims of the recent (Sandy) storm get compensated/relief support? What is this financial model
- We see a lot of community vs. individual tensions here. "It get's down to individual dune vs. dune situations..." One person's improved view (reduced dune) can have huge impacts on others in each particular community...

- The more long-term resilient we plan our communities, the greater the changes (increased dunes, greater sea walls, houses on stilts) the more expensive short-term costs become, even if it mitigates long-term damages...
- There is a great pressure to get people back into their homes, NOW, making codes changes and “no build zones” efforts a great hardship for displaced residents.
- What about the disabled and elderly? Do we really force them to have homes on stilts?
- Political pressure rises for short-term results while a longer-term view is crucial.
- Is the shore reconstruction a public good? A private benefit for the wealthy? A national public good? A local or state public good?
- Should an old, poorly-built home be protected? Rebuilt? Subsidized?
- How can we insure that all-income levels and classes have access to the shore? One community of trailer parks decided to close shop and sell the land to developers after the storm...

Other concerns and questions:

- What level of income diversity exists at the shore locations? Is there public housing?

Approach 3: Restore and Retreat

Pros:

- Integrate natural systems as multiple lines of defense, e.g., barrier islands, coastal oyster beds, etc., into the strategies
 - Island can't take all of these buildings
 - Seems like we build where we want to, e.g., Bergen Wegmans
 - Take more vulnerable areas for natural systems
 - Build on less vulnerable areas that could be used for many years to come – quality and construction
 - Redlining specific geographic areas
 - What if you don't help people come back
 - Green Acres program in NJ
 - Buy homes at pre-storm price to not rebuild
 - Buy out homes but still have use of the land
 - Come back in something mobile, e.g., RV and shut down when hurricane comes and drive off
 - Structure agreement with homeowners upon death to reclaim
 - Connections to land are more generational
 - Longer time horizon to plan and make it happen so they don't feel kicked out
- Consensus in the community
 - Not realistic as an overall strategy
 - Local communities can fight for this option
 - Difficult for long term planning
 - Limit the number of secondary homeowners like the Swiss in the Alps
 - How far inland, e.g., Sea Isle development
 - Two miles?
 - Miami example - there is no expectation to live on the beach

Common Ground:

- This is really hard
- Difficult to assign a common approach
- Create incentives
 - Some of Approaches 2 and 3
 - Borough and State level, homeowners, common space

- Ratables in municipalities are impacted when you give up a house for space
- Communication
 - Endorsement of people
 - Regulations are hard to impose on people
 - Need a plan
- Natural disasters need a common approach nationally
- Problem of government debt and the pool of money available
 - “I know I’m taking a risk but I want my home”
- Will take a long time to get to Approach 3 but we need to there eventually