Moderator Report – Group 3

Date of Forum: July 15, 2013       Location of Forum: WHYY

Moderator name(s): Shakira Abdul-Ali; Jeff Branch

Group Description:
There were 12 people in attendance. 6 men and 6 women. This was a highly engaged group with passion and commitment to the deliberative process as outlined for them. They inquired to seek further clarity and stayed focus on building on others’ comments. There were a number of people who would be deemed experts, and engaged in a way that was respectful of the entire group.

Two of the participants were New Jersey residents with concerns related to building for maintenance, longevity and survival (preparedness) and enhancing awareness about the reality of global warming. Eight of the participants were residents of Philadelphia and the surrounding Philadelphia suburbs. This included participants who either owned property as rental property (2 people), had family and friends who owned property who were impacted by Sandy (2 people), and one person whose father-in-law was a mayor of an impacted community in Upper Township. All eight recounted memories of the experience at the shore, including concerns about the ecology of the shore. This group also included by profession and/or education, architects (business owner, student) and city planners. Two participants worked for the Federal Gov’t (Congressional Appropriations) a resident of Philadelphia with experience working with Hurricane Katrina recovery in Louisiana, and a resident of the Netherlands who is an advisor for the Federal Government with an expressed mantra of rebuilding by design, a systems approach to storm preparedness and climate change. One participant was an architectural student, an activist for Occupy Sandy (lives now in NYC but originally from overseas) with concerns about climate change, water and looking at social systems as critical to the process of redesigning after Sandy.

Choice 1: Rebuild and Prepare

- Rebuilding makes sense because is it for the immediate future; it is for “now;” there is so much invested there, economically & socially. It’s what “has to happen.”
- Care should be taken, so as not to place too much emphasis on building for “now,” over building for “all.” Our discussion needs ‘balance.’ Rebuilding has been sporadic; it’s happening on one block, and not on another. Everyone’s concerns (from all economic strata) need consideration.
- Politics plays such a big role; allocations for rebuilding have been made, but have not actually been spent where needed – mostly due to political reasons. We need to learn from past storms, e.g. the Nor’Easter in ’62 which wiped out Long Beach Isl., and after which, was completely rebuilt.
- Our current government framework regarding preparedness is overly impacted by multiple, and sometimes, overlapping jurisdictional rules and regulations, at local, state and federal levels. We need coordinated approach, but this is not promised.
• FEMA has a role, but plans for recovery need to be in place before another storm occurs.
• All of the questions are too complicated for the simplicity of a focus on the ‘demarcation line’ of Memorial Day as a target for rebuilding / re-opening “the Shore.” With so much focus on that target, we might be in danger of “Sandy Fatigue,” wherein there may be less energy for the ‘real’ work, which needs to continue well beyond the ‘end of the season,’ by the Fall of the year. By that time, there may not be enough energy to move forward with a more coherent response.
• Some communities hadn’t completed the Dune Replenishment program. Those communities that hadn’t completed, got hammered. The dunes saved many communities.
• Rebuilding only gets you where you ‘were.’ Preparedness means being ready for a future event.
• Ideally, all three options (Rebuild; Rethink; Restore) must be taken on as they work together, necessarily, to address the ‘now,’ prepare for a future event, and address the natural course of the environment.
• We need to get the basics up and running
• Rebuilding is needed to save necessary current facilities.
• This option is grounded in the ‘physicality’ of the space, and the economy represented by the region. There has not been enough emphasis on the well-being for the People in that region. The lack of care has led to a pathological behavior in people who have been left behind and disregarded. Mother Nature is a Non-Negotiable Player. Not seeing care for the Humanity in this region, as much as there is for the physical structures in the region.
• The emotional trauma that accompanies these events must be addressed.
• We need to address the immediate challenges in order to be ready to plan for the future.
• There isn’t enough attention to coastal challenges, the global issues that are reflective of this issue; it’s not a ‘sexy’ issue
• When issues are politicized, it creates an ‘abstract image’ of those issues, which does not reflect the complexity of the details of what people are actually experiencing.
• These challenges require a methodical approach, and an appreciation for the granular issues in this case. Rebuild and Prepare must be an invitation for real “community participation and interaction.”
• After the Storm, there was a real sense of community integration, with people working together, and supporting each other.
• Much focus has been placed on the $38 billion dollar economy. This is in tension with a sense of ‘neighbors caring for neighbors.’
• For everyone who is interested in participating in the discussions related to the reconstruction efforts along the Shore, there is a weekly call on Tuesday evenings. To get the call-in pin#, email Ewanka (pronounced Evanka) at mutualaide@gmail.com The call-in # is 215-678-8690
Choice 2: Redesign and Adapt

- Do we halt development (rebuilding and new development)?
  - (Example) In Louisiana rebuilding was allowed in areas that will be flooded again.
  - Decisions have to be made at the federal level because of politics
  - Federal gov’t will have to say “you can’t rebuild” because it won’t happen at state and local levels
- Who will compensate people who are losing property?
  - How is fair-market value determined?
- What is there to learn from Louisiana? The data – historical and factual data to hear the story of rebuilding and development. Part of the learning included...
  - Somewhat rebuilding to new standards
  - However the covenant with the land was not adhered to
- How can NJ learn from the mistakes or what didn’t work?
- We need to engage research…and design scenarios based on the historical likelihood of storm events to support planning to preserve and support the economy and stay connected to the social capital
- Too often the social capital or loss is not dealt with or left out of the equation
  - If we reframe the conversation, anything that happens, money will be spent both on the social and physical elements to attract investors in how we approach rebuilding. It is not the physical structures, but also the social structures that need to be rebuilt
- Rethink Development Plan...practices and standards of rebuilding
- (Example) There needs to a ‘Blue Acres’ program that protects flood prone areas (see Old Bridge story)
- Need an Open Space robust funding source
- Need to reframe the conversation...Need to talk to the positive side of ‘Where you can rebuild’
  - Resilience is about the positives of looking at the whole system (why and how) of rebuilding
- What is required to engage fully into a plan of reframing the conversation about the (re)development plan?
  - Bring all stakeholders (whole system) into the plan (Homeowners, Investors, State, Federal, Local as important voices).
  - For both short-term and long-term planning
- (Example) LBI construction included new standards/ As a result, no homes damaged
  - Need to embrace construction based on today’s new standards with storm control prevention
  - Standards are being revised downward now because of the change resistance
  - Learned that we need an incremental approach to face the resistance across all levels of stakeholders in the communities
- We need to think of the Human Element. It seems like it is the survival of the economical fittest. How do we address it to ensure that there is equity in experience for different economic stratas?
As an example, of learning from others (Netherlands), We can have the surrounding areas built up with a focus on preparedness

- Physical structure to withstand the storms
- Social structure to build-on and sustain ‘Coming Together’ as a Regional community to build a safer region. A coordinated effort for construction
- Mutualaid@gmail.com an organization that is ‘coming together’ to look at all the ‘impacts of the storm’
- Protecting the entire region is ideal

Choice 3: Retreat and Restore

- Looking at the FACTS – this (storms, etc.) is going to happen. Politicians may not want to deal with it, but it must be addressed.
- So. Cape May was washed away in a previous storm.
- It may not be helpful to see, “the Shore,” as a “hard border.” Maybe it can be redefined to incorporate a more ‘inland’ location.
- We need to “Re-Vision” the communities, if we’re going to Retreat and Restore.
- People don’t want to think about it. It is very emotional; so many families are so connected to The Shore.
- What would a re-Vision look like? I don’t know! It has been a “Right of Passage” for H.S. teens in New Jersey for decades! (Graduation Night / Prom Night ‘destination’). It’s been a family tradition that is deeply compelling; Shore homes have been passed down through generations.
- Blue Acre Projects are in place to leave homes to public open spaces.
- Climate studies have suggested where coastal movements may occur; we need to pay attention to those studies to plan for a retreat.
- How many storms will it take, before we say, “it no longer makes sense to rebuild?”
- What about families who simply can’t afford to rebuild?
- There is still an opportunity to look at building safer communities, over building more storm-resistant structures. However – this option may be characterized as “socialism,” which is “un-American.” BAD!!!!
- Dunes work. There should be eminent domain; ala – we vaccinate because it’s a good idea. It works. We may need to take properties, and we need to create equitable means for valuing properties,
- Government is heavily siloed; there’s an alphabet-soup collection of monetary resources; in the past, there has been confusion and a lack of coordination in the responses, when the money ‘hits the ground.’ This is getting better, but we have much further to go.
- Taking a regional approach is a MUCH bigger job than it seems; several mainland towns, a bit more inland, got hammered. There is a need for a “restore” approach to take this into the consideration – don’t just focus on the coastline alone.
- Some towns “never saw it coming.” These towns need plans for future events, as well.
- What should be done about the barrier islands that have the newer, more expensive homes?
• What should be done about the inland homes, which were less well-built, less expensive, “trailer park” homes?
• There are still houses that are just piles of debris, today, as we speak. These families can’t get rebuilding funds until they PAY for debris removal! Currently, FEMA funds do not cover for removal of debris. What programs can be put together to help citizens to pay these immediate expenses?
• Rebuilding is equivalent to “building better.”

Common Ground:
• We all do want some development on the barrier islands; maybe not all of what has been there, but certainly some of what’s still there.
• We all here seem to be “left of center” – at least on this topic of the Jersey Shore. (e.g., we all accept climate change realities; we accept a role for government intervention and planning; we know there must be some retreat)
• Our collective response must go beyond politics, incorporating Facts, and Planning
• We share a sense of Regionalism and coming together.
• We agree that One Size does not fit All.
• There must be a clearly-defined path for success; defined objectively, and ahead of time. It must be defined incrementally – e.g., NJ’s newest regulations began way too aggressively. Now they’re backing off a bit; becoming more flexible and reasonable.
• There needs to be a blend of short-term and long-term responses.
• We need to plan for Seven Generations.
• We need to push our leaders to maintain momentum.
• We need to find leaders who will work differently, and together.
• Leaders need to recognize the long-term nature of the challenge.
• We need to insure that LIVES are protected.
• Our collective response requires more tolerance, and more talking.
• The good news is, Sandy and Irene happened in New Jersey, where there is a large economy (worth saving), and a lot of brain power (colleges, universities, and industry leadership), that can be applied to seeking solutions.