

**REPORT TO TOWN COUNCIL
RESILIENCY COMMITTEE
DECEMBER 13, 2024**

The Committee hosted a coastal resiliency forum on November 19th that was attended by representatives from Lewes, Rehoboth Beach, Henlopen Acres, Dewey Beach, and Bethany Beach. Also in attendance was Danielle Swallow, Coastal Hazards Specialist with Delaware Sea Grant. The purpose of the forum was for the coastal communities to share information on resiliency efforts and projects in their respective towns; identify challenges or obstacles to those efforts; and to share resources and identify areas of potential collaboration. An article about the event, written by the Bethany Beach Landowners Association, is attached.

While awaiting word on our BRIC grant application and the finalization of the York Road study, the Committee will be working on a prioritization of resiliency efforts for the Town and beginning to discuss suggested changes to the Town code.

Respectfully submitted,
Edie Dondero, Chairperson

COASTAL RESILIENCY FORUM

Bethany Beach Mayor Ron Calef and Bethany Beach Landowner Association Board member Chip Smith attended this forum held at the South Bethany Town Hall on Tuesday, November 19, 2024 from 9:00am to 1:00pm. In addition to host South Bethany, elected officials and senior staff attended representing Dewey Beach, Henlopen Acres, and Rehoboth Beach participated. After an open statement by South Bethany Beach Mayor Edie Dondero, the 18 participants heard an excellent presentation by Ms. Danielle Swallow, Delaware Sea Grant, on “***Building Resilience to Climate and Weather Hazards***”. Next, each town spoke about their resiliency planning and regulatory efforts, key issues, and potential solutions.

Participants generally agreed that a major challenge from governance and public relations perspectives was breaking down the misperception of the public and business community that resiliency work and promoting development are at odds. Preserving property values (to support code changes, and assessments) can be a clear, unifying message. Without resiliency work the very values and resources that drive economic development will be lost. Ms. Amy Marasco, Councilperson and Environmental Subcommittee, Lewes, made a critically important point that can help us all achieve the shared goals of the coastal towns, that is “*make room for the water*”. Several communities have focused on developing clear, actionable definitions of pervious and impervious surfaces for use in town codes, and for incentivizing use of pervious surfaces.

Collaboration among the coastal towns is an important strategy that will facilitate success, along with identifying opportunities to share ideas, resources, staff, equipment, and facilities. It is also important for coastal town governments to figure out what towns need versus what towns want to help with prioritizing and budgeting. There was general agreement that climate change and sea level rise are fundamental threats to the health and well-being, economic survival, and preservation of coastal communities and properties. In our region, the trend is increasingly warm temperatures, more frequent/powerful storms and floods, and less predictability in terms of weather patterns. Using Bethany Beach as an example, the dune and beach protection system requires renourishment more often and with greater volumes of sand required to restore the original design. Costs have escalated due to inflation, the high cost of sand, increases in construction and labor costs, and the fact that more sand and work is required to maintain the authorized federal project design. As an aside, in recognition of these challenges, DNREC is conducting a study to examine the benefits of the beach and dune projects, and hoping to use the results to justify asking five coastal towns to help pay for the DNREC’s share of future renourishment and restoration work (none of the coastal towns currently have or will have the funds to contribute).

Bethany Beach Mayor Calef handed out a “*Homeowners Help the Town Fight Flooding Initiative*” pamphlet which outlines in words and photographs actions property owners can take to nip away at the adverse effects flooding, especially nuisance/sunny day flooding. While there is some regional variation up and down the coast in terms of landscape characteristics, the coastal towns do have shared challenges --- challenges that the towns, and organizations such as the BBLA, can work on together. Workshop participants generally agreed that in the long-term piecemeal approaches do not work well. But, every small action helps, there is no single solution.

A major, and very impactful issue is that the coastal towns have no direct, regulatory control over development impacts generated outside of coastal towns. Over-development, loss of forests and wetlands, filling of low areas that used to hold stormwater, the barrier effect of new and increasingly higher/larger roads, and the laxity of the Sussex County Council are making the coastal towns enclaves under serious attack. Flooding has been made worse; water quality has declined; unacceptable amounts of natural and open area have been lost; forests and trees have been the victim of clear-cutting for development projects; birds and fish are disappearing; so-called environmental mitigation projects are poorly designed or subject to failure; and, overall the very special environmental, cultural, and social values that brought people to the coastal towns are being lost or degraded. According to Ms. Swallow, tourism and recreation support about 104,500 jobs with \$8.3 billion in annual revenue. Climate change and the failure of Sussex County Council (for many decades) to wisely plan for the future, protect county natural and cultural resources, and promulgate appropriate development codes and restrictions, are rapidly undermining prospects for a healthy future.

Some specific challenges that the coastal communities are working on include:

- Recognizing dredged material as “soil” (a resource) not “spoil (to be wasted) and use it beneficially in natural shoreline and restoration projects
- How FEMA/USACE authorities, regulations, and funds are primarily reactive, not preventative (Congress can address this issue with new or amended law)
- Social vulnerability, some groups are disproportionately impacted --- the aging population presents challenges during disasters due to mobility, health, income and other issues
- Challenges caused by a lack of staff and funds; lack of support from state and federal governments
- Addressing deferred maintenance of stormwater infrastructure, cleaning out drains and swales, installing check valves

- Use the ***Living shorelines Delaware Flood Planning Tool*** to see visually flood risk, development patterns, etc., at <https://floodplanning.dnrec.delaware.gov/>
- Historic properties: often there is resistance to elevating, floodproofing, or relocating historic structures because changes in setting and the visual appearance adversely affect the characteristics that make a property historically significant --- however, education must be used to communicate the fact that historic properties will be lost altogether if action