

Considering “More Resilient” Areas

At the October 26, 2015 Regional Resiliency Evening Exchange, a working group gathered to test an approach to evaluating what areas may be “more resilient” and therefore considered as preferred candidates for development or redevelopment if communities are concerned about encouraging growth or relocation to areas that are less vulnerable to sea level rise. The North Florida Land Trust shared a process that has been used successfully to facilitate stakeholders as they consider the environmental attributes they value most, thereby allowing for the creation of maps that show lands for preservation that reflect the values of the stakeholders. We used five attributes related to natural resources (ecological greenways, strategic habitat, surface waters, aquifer recharge, wetlands) and five related to development (agriculture, elevation, roadways, pipelines and transmission lines, and 6' of sea level rise). We eliminated from consideration (conceptually and as part of the presentation we used) conservation lands, historic districts and landmarks, airport zones, military facilities, 3' of sea level rise and storm surge categories 1, 2, and 3. We used two maps to represent areas that policy indicates would be desirable for development in Northeast Florida: Developed areas, and the image representing the preferred growth pattern in the region: Multiple Growth Centers. With the benefit of this information, participants were asked to vote on the attributes.

Post Exercise Observations

- The decisions as to what attributes to ask people to vote on, as well as which should be eliminated from consideration and which should be encouraged, have much to do with outcomes. In addition, our presumption was that attributes to be voted on were of equivalent significance, which is a baseline value judgement that needs to be thought through. Communities should consider an inclusive public process to make these decisions.
- Our process used smart and engaged volunteers at a single meeting. As we were testing the process rather than producing an actual map, we did not concern ourselves with the diversity of the sectors they represented or their level of familiarity with issues related to sea level rise. Communities considering using this process to produce a “more resilient areas’ map would do well to try to include representatives of a broad range of stakeholder groups and should provide information to them so that they have sufficient context to understand why and how the map is being created. Experts could provide insight into the maps representing current plans and anticipated changes and would be helpful in facilitating discussion on what lands to eliminate from consideration, where plans or policy support development and the nature of the attributes being considered.
- The attributes to be voted on pose challenges as far as “apples to apples” comparison. In our experience, the natural resource maps were shaded to indicate the concentration of the resource or the ecosystem services provided and participants were asked to vote on the degree of sensitivity they value when considering areas that were more resilient. Voting on other attributes was posed as yes/no (include 6' of sea level rise?), proximity to infrastructure or elevations observed to be more resilient. The varying standards were confusing for participants. To the extent possible, if communities can assemble the data so that the same questions, or type of questions, can be asked for all, this would be desirable.
- Subject to the caveats above which indicate more upfront work should be done to prepare for the voting process, the group did demonstrate that a community could use a similar process to create a “more resilient areas” map to be used as a vehicle to encourage public discussion in advance of decision making.