

ANOTHER VIEW

Floods: Resiliency is just good business

By Resiliency Committee of
Northeast Florida Regional Council

More than \$25 billion in private property value is at risk from the storm surge associated with a powerful hurricane, and sea level rise will only make that worse, according to a 2015 Northeast Florida Regional Council estimate.

The Public/Private Regional Resiliency Committee of the regional council has been working since June 2014 on actions that will make Northeast Florida more capable of bouncing back after a catastrophic event. We are business-focused, and when we started, we believed that a business focus was the best approach for our region. We wrote our last opinion column in May, 2015, and the start of this year's hurricane season inspired us to provide an update.

We stand by our original mantra: The world is changing. We work to position Northeast Florida to thrive in that change. We are more convinced than ever that business must focus on the issue, but we now better understand the value of other approaches. Everyone who is building a structure now, regardless of its use, should consider the potential impacts of flood, wind, fire, sea level rise and climate change.

We must think about how we construct and where we place building systems so they are resilient. As taxpayers, we must insist that government incorporate resiliency into communities and build resiliently when it builds for us.

So what have we learned?

We learned that Northeast Florida is full of smart people who are willing and able to work on resiliency. Banks have added the topic to financial literacy curricula. Regional experts have met to discuss ways to incentivize investment to go to more resilient areas. Scores of volunteers have assisted with our action items.

We learned that government can lead. The city of Jacksonville made its Coastal High Hazard Area an Adaptation Action Area. Once you get past the planning jargon, this is a big step toward resiliency.

The city of St. Augustine is now out front in the community discussing resiliency. Other cities and communities in our region are having the resiliency conversation as well.

We learned that buildings constructed before there were flood maps are located throughout Northeast Florida, and we do not know their level of risk. We are mapping such structures. When we understand the nature of the problem, we will talk with our

communities to see how one might retrofit these buildings to become more resilient, and with banks to discuss how they might assist with financing this work.

Our youth are leading the charge on this issue. Grownups did not respond to our Regional Resiliency Rebuild challenge, but kids were immediately interested and engaged.

We learned about the importance of natural systems unique to our region. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is doing a coastal resilience assessment of the St. Johns River Basin, providing us a baseline from which to develop our regional vulnerability assessment.

So what comes next?

Once we complete our regional vulnerability assessment, we will all be able to have community and regional discussions regarding how to build, where to build and where not to build back.

A region that is having those discussions is marketable and attractive to business and residents. We simply believe that resiliency is good business.

*Information: www.rci-nef.org/P2R2.html.
The P2R2 Committee of
the Northeast Florida
Regional Council*