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THE SPRAWL

#DOWNTOWNISUNDERWATER

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Ask a tourist visiting anywhere in Northeast Florida why they chose to come to this small dot on the globe and the majority will say something about the scenic waterways — beaches, Intracoastal Waterway, springs, rivers and tributaries. These pre-installed tourist attractions are good for our collective pocketbook, but if a growing consensus of global scientists are proved correct regarding the impact of climate change and rising sea levels, those same waterways, combined with a lack of vertical geography, will put residents of the region in harm's way.

"We're way behind the ball," says Marc Hudson, land protection director with North Florida Land Trust. "Jacksonville really needs to come to bear on the issue; much of our riverfront is definitely susceptible to serious storm surges, including newly proposed billion-dollar developments like the Shipyards, and with many tributaries to the St. Johns spread throughout our community, the possibility for impacts is wide-ranging."

Sea level rise may bring to mind an image of water breaching the sea wall around homes on the river, but that picture is only a rough sketch of the magnitude of the seriousness Northeast Florida faces. Buried utilities, such as power, sewage, and water lines, don't interact well with saltwater. Toxic brownfields that end up underwater pose a number of health and safety concerns, as do buried petroleum storage tanks and other pockets of buried chemical waste. Most stressing will be the impact on the community's drinking water. Saline intrusion into the aquifer will make some well water undrinkable. In short, it will be a struggle of resources.

The issue of sea level rise falls into two categories: gradual sea level rise and severe events. A Hurricane Sandy or Katrina type of event leaves thousands of people in distress, not to mention the economic damage levied. No matter the caliber of accounting skills mayor-elect Lenny Curry has under his belt, a storm recovery could tick into the billions of dollars.

"We are facing multiple, urgent problems that need to be addressed," says Sarah Boren, executive director for the U.S. Green Building Council, a nonprofit focused on sustainability. "Inaction is not an option anymore. We have the pro-business innovative solutions right now at our fingertips."

The dialogue on climate change and increasing sea level rise is starting to bubble; the goal is to bring it to a boil. In response to an action item contained in First Coast Vision — a 50-year plan for the seven-county district — a new group was created by the North Florida Regional Council (NFRC). On its website, NFRC asked the community for input and opinions concerning climate change. Sea level rise was overwhelmingly what the community asked the council to look into.

NFRC created P2R2, a new group focusing on *resiliency* (the buzz word for preparing for and combating the effects of sea level rise) through connecting the public and private sectors, made its soft launch in May with an op-ed in *The Florida Times-Union*, and its hard launch kicks off on July 16 at Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville, in conjunction with Regions Bank. The group will announce its action items, its process, its partners, and how the community can get involved. P2R2 will be a working arm to create incentives and to get companies to think about long-term plans for doing business in Northeast Florida.

The Regional Community Institute of Northeast Florida Inc. — a nonprofit created by NFRC — weighed in on some policy issues. One of them was to focus on what could be accomplished without waiting for national or international solutions to appear and to get the business community on board. Without the business sector behind the push, sea level conversations (and the larger climate change conversation) would be just another party of one led by conservationists. After all, the political will follows the business sector.

"It's not a partisan issue. It's an issue of the community. Are we preparing ourselves, whether it be for sea level rise or the aftermath after of a hurricane or a man-made disaster?" asks Brian Teeple, chief executive officer of NFRC. "If we are resilient, then we bounce back from or avoid bad things. That makes us unique, and I think it makes a very attractive place for us to live. Frankly, if you're on the economic development side, it makes us a very attractive place to do business, too. It's not a Republican versus Democrat issue. It's not a developer versus conservationist issue."

And while it may not be a partisan issue, in theory, the reality is that our gubernatorial leadership is not only inactive about climate change, but censoring state workers from speaking about it publicly.

Recently, Dutch sea level rise expert Henk Ovink — who's currently working with the Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force to make the Northeast portion of the United States more resilient after Hurricane Sandy caused an estimated \$65 billion-ticket in damage — told the *Miami New Times*, "It's scary that the state of Florida briefed staff not to talk about climate change. When you think about future risks and how to deal with them, that is not the right approach. You have to address those issues and come up with a strategy. It's an opportunity."