



Connecticut State Flood Risk Symposia

University of Connecticut School of Law
Starr Hall, 55 Elizabeth Street, Hartford, CT
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Background on the Symposia and floodplain management in Connecticut:

- Connecticut has been a historic leader in floodplain management initiatives, and recently in championing proactive planning for climate change and sea level rise.
- The Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA) has advised municipalities to plan for 20 in/50 cm of sea level rise by 2050 based on the upper bound of sea level rise projections.
- Weather patterns are changing. Recent analysis by the Northeast Regional Climate Center (NRCC) has shown an increase in extreme precipitation events attributed to these changing weather patterns in New England.
- Sea level rise and extreme precipitation events will bring new, challenging problems for all Connecticut municipalities, both inland and coastal, including maintaining critical infrastructure, legal ramifications, regulatory issues, erosion of the local tax base, and environmental resource protection concerns.
- There are data and information gaps associated with these topics. UCONN CIRCA and CLEAR has the ability to further study these issues.
- The Connecticut Association of Flood Managers (CAFM) is a professional organization started in 2015 with the mission to promote education, policies, and activities that mitigate current and future flood losses, costs, and human suffering caused by flooding and to protect the natural and beneficial functions of floodplains.
- Currently all 177 Connecticut communities participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Each community has floodplain maps prepared by FEMA and local flood regulations. The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CTDEEP) is the state coordinating agency for the NFIP.

- There have been 14 flood disaster declarations in Connecticut since 1954, most recently Tropical Storm Irene in August 2011 and Superstorm Sandy in October 2012.

GROUP 1

How can Connecticut address the challenges of adapting riverine and coastal infrastructure to climate change and the associated hazards such as more frequent flooding and sea level rise?

Topic 1 Questions:

1. How will communities maintain critical infrastructure accounting for sea level rise projections?
2. When and how will a community decide to abandon a road or other infrastructure versus maintaining it?
3. If infrastructure is maintained with walls or new adaptive structures, how will the environmental impacts be evaluated?
4. Will laws, statutes or regulations need to be changed to allow for preserving infrastructure that would otherwise be underwater?
5. What cost benefit model will communities use to evaluate the real benefits of maintaining existing infrastructure versus retreat and reconstruction?
6. What public outreach will communities do to get residents ready for the reality of limited maintenance of failing infrastructure?

GROUP 2

How can communities begin to evaluate the option of elevating homes versus pursuing acquisition and/or retreat strategies in riverine and coastal areas?

Topic 2 Questions:

1. How do we change the current political will to favor retreat versus elevation?
2. What can we do to change our current municipal tax model to promote retreat versus hardening vulnerable homes in place? Discuss the benefits of green space, such as Meriden Hub project as an economic generator.
3. How do we change public opinion to favor acquisition/retreat versus elevation?
4. What tools to state and local officials need to accomplish acquisition and retreat projects over elevation in place?
5. Can new funding mechanisms be developed to support retreat and acquisition projects?
6. Can government work with business to create more sustainable development in vulnerable areas that will also support the tax base?
7. How will communities effectively evaluate the real benefits and costs of acquisition or retreat versus elevation?

GROUP 3

How does Connecticut balance riverine floodway or coastal waterfront redevelopment and future risk in Connecticut's historic mill towns, harbors, and industrial corridors?

Topic 3 Questions:

1. Connecticut's historic buildings provide much of the "sense of place" for towns and cities along Connecticut's defining river corridors. How do we protect these buildings but also reduce flood risk?
2. What are prudent ways to balance economic development in place-defining historic structures in high risk areas?
3. Are there other vulnerabilities to reinvestments?
4. Is economic development the only method to cleaning up what may also be environmentally compromised sites such a formerly industrial brownfields?
5. Are there "living with water" solutions that make sense for these sites?
6. What are the long term viability prospects with sea level rise and increase in precipitation?
7. Are floodplain variances or exemptions for historic structures counterproductive to fostering sustainable development and historic preservation?

GROUP 4

How do local municipalities, non-profits, and state regulatory agencies re-emphasize natural and beneficial functions in Connecticut's densely developed coastal and riverine areas? (for example, living shorelines, floodplain restoration/enhancement, green infrastructure, adaptive designs)

Topic 4 Questions:

1. Develop a benefit cost analysis that provides the foundation for prioritizing natural and beneficial function over development or redevelopment.
2. How do communities best provide linkages within the community and NGOs to rally support for natural and beneficial function?
3. Are there best practice examples for conversions to natural and beneficial function solutions? I.e. Green spaces like ...? Something in the Quinnipiac Corridor? Or Plainville?
4. Is there a practical future to promoting natural and beneficial function along Connecticut's shoreline where property values are so high and a boon to local grand lists? Even where sources like the Nature Conservancy, CIRCA, and others in New York City have shown that natural systems such as tidal marshlands and oyster or shellfish beds slow down wave velocity potentially reducing wave impact damage?
5. What are the long term viability prospects of these areas with future sea level rise and climate change impacts?