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Beacon Hill Asked to Expand Waterfront Flood Defenses

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Researchers are urging state legislators to allow experimental new coastal resiliency projects, providing a guide for protecting waterfront real estate from climate change.

In a key change, the bill allows resiliency projects such as living shorelines to be built on the watersheet beyond the mean high water mark, a departure from longstanding state policy.

"Everyone wants these types of projects in theory, but so many of these projects aren't present in the Northeast," Alice Brown, chief of planning and policy for Boston Harbor Now, said in an interview. "The permitting hurdles are so large to overcome that it becomes financially infeasible."

Brown and researchers from University of Massachusetts-Boston testified Wednesday in support of legislation sponsored by Rep. Dan Hunt, D-Dorchester and Sen. Brendan Crighton, D-Lynn, that would give state regulators more discretion to allow nature-based approaches, such as living shorelines, in demonstration and research projects. Such trials would be monitored for their effectiveness in larger-scale projects, including urban areas that are disproportionately affected by heat islands and flooding.

State laws on waterfront development don't reflect the latest forecasts on climate change and rising sea levels, bill backers testified before the legislature's Joint Committee on Environmental & Natural Resources. Boston Harbor sea levels are projected to rise 40 inches by 2070. And a United Nations report issued



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Boston's Fort Point Channel is seen as a major point of vulnerability to stormwater flooding. State laws on waterfront development don't reflect the latest forecasts on climate change and rising sea levels, experts have warned.

Wednesday declared there's a 2 in 3 chance that the world will at least temporarily see global temperatures rise more than 1.5 degrees above the mid-19th century average in the next five years, a key warming limit that is often associated with substantially bigger damage to ecosystems, polar sea ice and human lives.

After flood waters turned the Boston Children's Museum into a temporary island during a 2018 nor'easter, the museum hired architects Sasaki to design a landscaped park extending into Fort Point Channel. The park would double as an absorbent living shoreline rising next to the Boston Harborwalk.

"It's how the protections of the coastline can move into the water that is really the challenge to overcome right now," Brown said.

Some developers already have incorporated nature-based resiliency strategies under the existing regulations, such as the "living shore-

line" at East Boston's Clippership Wharf development that replicates a salt marsh and absorbs storm waters.

The Flatley Co. proposes building a 22-foot-tall barrier including floodable steps along the Mystic River to protect its proposed 1.8 million-square-foot redevelopment of the former Domino Sugar refinery in Charlestown.

The proposed 6.5 million-square-foot Dorchester Bay City development would include a 23-foot-tall flood barrier to protect the 36-acre property off Morrissey Boulevard.

The Climate Ready Boston study estimated a potential \$1.4 billion in damages from future flooding in the downtown area alone. A 3.8-mile flood barrier across the mouth of Boston Harbor would cost nearly \$12 billion, according to a 2018 study. ◀

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