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## **Coastal Cities Rethink Zoning Regulations in Fight Against Climate Change.**

**From Boston to Miami, coastal cities are changing where and how developers can build in order to protect homes and property from future flooding.**

After Hurricane Matthew in 2016, the Virginia Beach City Council had a change of heart.

The storm dropped between 14 and 18 inches of rain in less than 12 hours, leading to severe flooding. A couple years later, when a developer wanted the city to rezone 50 acres of land to build 32 homes, the council said no, even though it had previously approved residential development near the proposed site.

Argos Properties promptly sued. But in April, a judge ruled that the council had the authority to deny the application.

Virginia Beach is far from alone.

As severe weather has increased, more and more coastal cities from Boston to Miami have revamped their flood maps and placed more scrutiny on zoning decisions in order to protect homes and property from the long-term impacts of sea level rise. According to a 2018 study published by the National Academy of Science, the sea level will rise by more than two feet by the end of the century.

Boston has been at the forefront of this move.

The city created the Green Ribbon Commission in 2013 to study policy solutions that will mitigate the impact of climate change. It is also in the process of creating a flood resiliency overlay district, where developers can build in areas that will be impacted by sea level rise but under special rules.

“In Boston, we are taking a proactive approach to planning for climate change and rising sea levels,” says Molly McGlynn, a spokeswoman for the Boston Planning and Development Agency. “It is our goal that these guidelines will provide specific direction on implementing resilience measures to protect our waterfront and its residents for years to come.”

Miami is making similar moves.

In April, the city council passed rules to literally lift some residents out of floodwaters. Miami once required new construction to be elevated at least one foot above the floodplain, but it will now elevate those new homes five feet above floodwaters. New retail construction and infrastructure improvements will also have to be elevated.

“These are high priorities for people looking at how to protect communities from the impacts of climate change,” says David Cash, dean of the University of Massachusetts, Boston’s McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies.

Zoning isn't the only aspect of resiliency that governments are rethinking, says Cash.

Boston, for example, once looked to a sea wall to fend off sea level rise, but the option was deemed too expensive and ineffective. Cash says permanent berms, such as river levees on the Mississippi or sand dunes near oceans, are a more effective option for dampening the impact of sea level rise.

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