Floodplain Management and No Adverse Impact: Law and Policy Concerns

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Gulf Coast Community Flood Resilience:
Application of No Adverse Impact for Coastal Communities
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OVERVIEW

• Background:
  • No Adverse Impact (NAI) Principles
• Ownership of the Beach & Tidelands
  • The Public Trust Doctrine
• Legal Authority for Local Action
  • 5th Amendment Takings Claims
• Design Smart: Avoiding Takings Claims
• Recent Trends: A Look at Recent Legal Challenges to Stormwater Management and Coastal Development
• A Living Shorelines Example
• Recommended Practices: Conducting an Audit
POLICIES CONTRIBUTE TO RISK

• Federal Policies
  • NFIP & the 100-Year Standard
  • Emphasis on structural approaches
  • Disaster relief environment

• State & Communities
  • Emphasis on managing land use for short-term benefits
  • Flooding often seen as a federal problem

• Public Perceptions
  • Unaware of – or unwilling to accept – residual risk
  • Misplaced concerns about having to obtain flood insurance
Number of National Flood Insurance Program Policies in Force at Year-End, 1980-2015*

The number of NFIP policies in force has plunged by 549,000 or 9.6% since 2009, even as coastal development surges and sea levels rise.

Source: National Flood Insurance Program.
* As of July, 2015
CURRENT POLICIES INCREASE RISK:

- Promote intensification in risk areas
  - Ex: development in floodplain
- Do not take into consideration changing conditions
- Ignores adverse impacts to existing properties
- Undervalues natural floodplain functions

If we continue to encourage at-risk development and ignore the impact to others, can we accept the consequences…

... and, are you willing to pay for it?
Flooding, Baton Rouge Area, August 2016
NAI MITIGATION PRINCIPLES

• Mitigate While Not Transferring A Problem Elsewhere
• On-site Mitigation Retrofits
  • Elevation
  • Floodproofing
• Nonstructural Mitigation
  • Acquisition, Relocation & Restoration
  • Upstream Detention/Retention
• Structural Measures – Often With Adverse Impacts
  • Levees
  • Channels
  • Dams

Figure 7. Recommended construction in Coastal A Zone and V Zone.
FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT: ROLES

FEDERAL ROLE

- Federal
  - National Flood Insurance Act
  - FEMA, Corps, EPA & other federal agencies
  - National Flood Insurance Program

STATE ROLE

- State
  - State Floodplain Managers
  - State Land Use Programs & Policies
  - State Emergency Management
  - Cooperating Technical Partners
FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT ROLES

LOCAL ROLE
- Development Standards & Review
- Permitting & Code Enforcement
- Local Emergency Management Programs
  - Community Rating System

PERSONAL ROLE
- Risks & Decisions
- Information & Preparation
- Responsibilities & Expectations
PUBLIC TRUST DOCTRINE

Origins in Roman Law:

By the law of nature these things are common to all mankind, the air, running water, the sea and consequently the shores of the sea … The sheashore extends as far as the greatest winter flood runs up.

- Justian Code 535 CE (AD)
LEGAL ORIGINS

• U.S. Constitution
  • States retain ownership of the lands beneath navigable waters
  • Federal government retains supreme, but not exclusive, control over navigation
PUBLIC TRUST DOCTRINE

• State ownership of submerged lands held in trust for the public.
  • Of particular significance when planning for sea level rise
  • Also applies to riparian areas
• Can impact waterfront property boundaries
• Mississippi Public Trust Tidelands Act
  • Fixed waterfront boundaries along hardened shorelines; marsh properties continue to shift.
WATERS & LANDS IN PUBLIC TRUST

- Tidewaters to their farthest reaches
- Tidelands
  - In Mississippi, be aware of the Mississippi Public Trust Tidelands Act.
- Navigable-in-fact waters
- Permanently submerged lands
  - Unless previously conveyed to private hands by a Kings Grant (Spanish Land Grant – another common term in our area).
- Adjacent wetlands (varies widely among States)
LEGAL ZONES OF A BEACH

- Vegetation Line
- Average High Water Mark
- Crest
- Mean High Water Line
- Mean Low Water Line
- Beach Face
- Flooded by waves
- Swash Zone
- Dry Beach
- Wet Beach
- Open Water

MHW = Mean High Water
MLW = Mean Low Water
Who Owns the Beach?

The Public Owns:
- Access along the wet beach only for hunting, fishing, and navigation
- Wet Beach Below High Water
- Wet and Dry Beach
- Wet Beach; Access Along Dry Beach
LEGAL AUTHORITY FOR LOCAL FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT

Basic Principles Underlying Local Land Use Law
FEDERAL AUTHORITY

• **Tenth Amendment of U.S. Constitution:**
  - The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.
    - This is origin of state police power.
  - Gives states authority to adopt laws for the betterment of the **public health, safety, morals and general welfare**.
    - States have delegated authority to local governments through zoning enabling statutes.
STATE DELEGATION TO LOCAL

• **Mississippi Municipal Home Rule Statute:**
  - Gives municipal governments the authority to control their own affairs, properties, and finances.
  - Authority to adopt local laws and ordinances to manage these areas.
  - Limitation: cannot be inconsistent with Mississippi Constitution or state statutory laws.

• **Mississippi Planning Authority:**
  - Local planning commissions are authorized, but not required, to develop comprehensive plans. No plan can be adopted until a public hearing is held.
  - Zoning Authority: governing authority of each municipality and county may,..., regulate and restrict the erection, construction, reconstruction, alteration, repair or use of buildings, structures or land.
  - Miss. Code § 17-1-1 through § 17-1-39
A FEW OTHER LAWS AT PLAY

• **U.S. Constitution:**
  - Due Process – 14th Amendment
  - *Takings* – 5th Amendment
  - Freedom Speech – 1st Amendment

• **Federal and State Case Law**

• **Other Federal Laws**
  - Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act
  - Americans with Disabilities Act
  - Federal Fair Housing Amendments of 1988
  - Telecommunications Act of 1996
  - Civil Rights Act of 1968, Section 1983
5TH AMENDMENT TO THE US CONSTITUTION

No person shall be … deprived of life, liberty or property, without due process of law;

Nor shall private property be taken for public use without just compensation.
WHAT CONSTITUTES A TAKING?

- Physical occupation of private land
- Regulation that “goes too far”
- Permit condition that lacks a rational connection or “essential nexus” with a valid public purpose
- No “rough proportionality” between permit condition and impact of development
- Total deprivation of economic use
- Interference with “reasonable investment-backed expectations”
- Compensable taking may occur even when restriction is temporary
  - Called a “temporal taking” and value based on calculation of temporary loss
• No right to be a nuisance
• No right to violate the property rights of others
  • Ex: Can’t flood your neighbors property
• No right to be negligent
  • Can’t manage your property in a way that could reasonably be expected to cause harm to others
• No right to violate laws of reasonable surface water use or riparian laws
  • Ex: Can’t put a dam across a river that flows through your property
• No right to violate the public trust doctrine
DESIGN SMART:
ADDRESSING POTENTIAL TAKINGS CLAIMS

A Look at Ways to Minimize the Risk of Takings Claims
LEGAL STANDARD

Land Use Laws Must Do Two Things:

1) Accomplish a legitimate public objective, and
   (Public Health, Safety, Morals, and General Welfare)

2) Allow the landowner some economically viable use of the land.
   (Does not have to be the landowners preferred use)
LEGITIMATE PUBLIC OBJECTIVE

- Broad authority – can encompass many things
- Identify the public objective you are pursuing through the ordinance
- Identify studies/research that supports the terms of your ordinance
  - For example, flood maps may justify building higher or not building in certain areas because that accomplishes the legitimate public purpose of protecting public health and safety.
REMEMBER THIS IS BROAD:

- Design standards that limit adverse impacts in floodways can fall within this category.
  - They protect public safety and general welfare!
  - You are probably already doing some of these things.

EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- Building Codes
- Freeboard
- Preserving natural floodplain functions
- Green Infrastructure and Living Shorelines
- Low Impact Development techniques to manage stormwater
• Connect the dots in your ordinance
  • Including a preface or introductory statement that references the purpose you are accomplishing and the studies that back up this objective will further your cause should you find yourself in a legal dispute down the road; connect to the comprehensive plan as well.

• Remember Due Process!
  • You likely already hold public meetings and give the public the opportunity to comment on changes. This protects you from due process challenges down the road.
• **Does not** mean that property owner gets to do whatever they want with property.

• **Does** mean that the property still holds some economic value.

• How to address:
  - Have variance provisions that can be used where the ordinance makes a property completely unbuildable.

• And remember that economic viability only applies to activities the property owner could legally undertake.
US Supreme Court:

A regulation that destroys “all economically beneficial or productive use” of the lots is a taking **unless** the state could show that **background principles of nuisance and property law** already prohibit the same uses.

Back to the **public trust doctrine** (as a background principle of property law) and its role in shoreline management for sea level rise.

*Lucas v. South Carolina Coastal Council*
RECENT TRENDS

A Look at Recent Legal Challenges to Stormwater Management and Coastal Development
• **Boroujerdi v. City of Starkville** (Miss. Feb. 12, 2015)
  - What is a city’s liability for maintaining/operating wastewater management systems?

• Mississippi Tort Claims Act (MTCA)
  - Local government immune from liability when performing a discretionary function but not immune when performing ministerial function.

• So… is maintenance of city run stormwater system discretionary or ministerial?
WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT

- 2011 (City of Jackson v. Fortenberry):
  - MS Supreme Court held it stormwater discretionary

- 2013 (Little v. MDOT):
  - MS considers MTCA in road maintenance case.
  - Holds: if the function (road maintenance) is required by law, then it is a ministerial function

- 2015 (Boroujerdi):
  - Court finds that state and federal law require sewage maintenance
  - Therefore maintaining is ministerial
  - Meaning... city not exempt from liability – must perform maintenance (ie City cannot refuse to act if problem is known)
DUNE PROTECTION

  - The City began a large-scale public-works project to protect homes and business from storm-surge destruction by creating a barrier-wall of dunes connecting with other dunes to run the entire length of Long Beach Island
  - Exercised eminent domain authority where property owners did not voluntarily consent
  - Property owners sued because 22 foot high dune would block their view.
  - Successful at lower court level, appealed to NJ Supreme Court
DUNE PROTECTION

  • NJ Supreme Court held that while the dune may have reduced their property value by blocking the view, the dune may also have raised their property value by adding protection from storm surge.
  • In calculating whether the property owner suffered reduced property values (aka taking), the value ADDED by the dune protection had to be taken into consideration and might offset in property value diminution.
BULKHEADS &
THE PUBLIC TRUST


• Developer sought to install a bulkhead along the riverside of a barrier island to protect a new development from eroding banks.
• Town approved development plan – included 50 homes and 2 docks
• State denied permit for 2,783 foot long bulkhead that it found would permanently alter 2.5 acres of pristine tidelands
Kiawah Development Partners v. South Carolina Dept. of Health and Environmental Control

The basic principle underlying the legal issues in this case is the public trust doctrine “which provides that lands below the high water line are owned by the State and held in trust for the benefit of the public.”

Under the public trust doctrine, state tidelands can, in limited circumstances, be altered and still serve the public interest.

But under South Carolina law, the public interest is generally best served when the tidelands are preserved in their natural state.
**Kiawah Development Partners v. South Carolina Dept. of Health and Environmental Control**

The court, applying South Carolina law, found that the only one to benefit from the bulkhead was the developer of Kiawah and rejected an argument that the overall community would benefit financially from the development.

Because the bulkhead would only benefit the developer at the cost of public trust tidelands, the court upheld the state agency’s decision not to allow the bulkhead.

- A smaller (250 foot) bulkhead was allowed that did not disturb a vast area of public trust tidelands.
LOCAL AUTHORITY & THE PUBLIC TRUST

- **Town of Nags Head, North Carolina**

- Local government used the public trust as basis for removal of beachfront homes after storm.

- Several waterfront homes objected to the application of the ordinance to their properties. Filled lawsuit when Town condemned the properties and ordered removal after a storm damaged the properties in 2009 by Hurricane Irene.
The existence of any of the following conditions on any lot, whether improved or not, or other parcel of land within the corporate limits is hereby declared to be dangerous and prejudicial to the public health or safety and to constitute a public nuisance:

- Storm or erosion damaged structures and resulting debris. The existence of any of the following conditions associated with storm-damaged or erosion-damaged structures or their resultant debris shall constitute a public nuisance.
  - Damaged structure in danger of collapsing;
  - Damaged structure or debris from damaged structures where it can reasonably be determined that there is a likelihood of personal or property injury;
  - Any structure, regardless of condition, or any debris from damaged structure which is located in whole or in part in a public trust area or public land.
LOCAL AUTHORITY & THE PUBLIC TRUST

- **Town of Nags Head, North Carolina**

- State Supreme Court: questioned whether local governments had authority to implement the public trust; said that power was reserved to the state.
  - Threw the validity of the ordinance into question.
  - Lawsuits continued.
  - Town issued some building permits but work was very slow.

- But at the end of day: Case Settled Out of Court.
  - Homes will be removed.
  - Under the settlement agreement, all parties deny liability and no one admits fault.
  - Locals called it the “ghetto beach” because of the deteriorated state of the homes
THE “GHETTO BEACH”

The homes at Issue in North Carolina that the City wished to remove, locally referred to as the Ghetto Beach
A LIVING SHORELINE EXAMPLE
Living Shorelines are nature-based approaches to shoreline management.

Apply elements of green infrastructure to shoreline erosion control.

Can include a spectrum of techniques from all natural to hybrid approaches that include some natural and some hard design elements.

Appropriate design dependent on site suitability – wave action, fetch, other site specific conditions.

Work best in low energy areas like bays, bayous, and marshes.
Range of Approaches from Green to Gray

**Vegetation Only**
- Protects coastal areas from erosion
- Enhances habitat for coastal wildlife
- Improves water quality

**Lining Shoreline**
- Strengthening coastal dunes
- Reduces erosion vulnerability
- Increases coastal resilience

**Breakwater**
- Reduces wave energy
- Protects coastal infrastructure
- Enhances habitat for marine life

**Green - Softer Techniques**
- Small Wave / Small Fetch / Gentle Slope / Smooth Shore

**Living Shoreline**
- Natural coastal vegetation
- Enhances habitat for coastal wildlife
- Natural coastal protection

**Beach Nourishment Only**
- Restores beach width and depth
- Reduces erosion vulnerability
- Enhances coastal resilience

**Beach Nourishment & Vegetation on Dune**
- Combined approach for coastal protection
- Enhances natural coastal vegetation
- Natural coastal protection

**Bulkyhead**
- Stabilizes shoreline
- Protects coastal infrastructure
- Enhances coastal resilience

**Seawall**
- Provides coastal protection
- Protects coastal infrastructure
- Enhances coastal resilience

**How Green or Gray Should Your Shoreline Solution Be?**
- Consider the environmental impact
- Balance cost and effectiveness
- Select the best approach for your specific location

**Gray - Harder Techniques**
- Large Waves / Large Fetch / Steep Slope / Open Coast

**Operational & Maintenance**
- Initial Construction
- Operations & Maintenance

**Data Can Be Germane To:**
- Living Shorelines: when systems are implemented on German Shorelines, systems vegetate, alternates from time to time and especially

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From Systems Approach to Geomorphic Engineering (SAGE), sagecoast.org
LIVING SHORELINE LOCAL ORDINANCE

• Local governments have a range of options for protecting and managing their shorelines.

• Living shorelines can provide an alternative to hardened shorelines that provide the landowner with erosion control while still maintaining much of the natural functions by providing vegetated shorelines or a hybrid approach.
  
  • Great for fishing, water quality, etc.

• Living Shoreline Model Ordinance and drafting guide available at http://masgc.org/publications/living-shorelines
  

  • Contact me if you are interested or having questions about the model ordinance!
A FEW EXAMPLES

- Kent County, MD
  - Kent County, Md., Code § 6-3.10

- Brevard County, FL
  - Brevard County, Fla., Code § 62-3661

- Honolulu County, HI
  - Honolulu County, Haw., Code § 23-1.8

- Kaua‘i County, HI
  - Kaua‘i County, Haw., Code § 8-27.2

Living shoreline oyster reef restoration in Jockey’s Ridge North Carolina
KENT COUNTY, MARYLAND

- Requires property owners wanting hardened shoreline armor to demonstrate that a living shoreline is inappropriate for that site.
- Establishes criteria for evaluating the appropriateness of erosion control.

KAUA‘I COUNTY, HAWAI‘I

- Newly constructed structures cannot (1) adversely affect beach processes, (2) artificially fix the shoreline, (3) interfere with public access or public views along the shoreline, (4) impede natural processes and/or movement of the shoreline and/or sand dunes, or (5) alter the grade of the shoreline set back area.
RECOMMENDED PRACTICES:
CONDUCTING AN AUDIT
CONDUCT AN AUDIT

- Review any existing policies in place
- Clearly identify the new zoning objective
  - Look at other communities and various model ordinances – find an ordinance that suits your community (tailor to your needs – cookie cutter approach can cause problems)
- Compare to existing zoning
  - Any possible conflicts that need resolving?
- Potential Roadblocks
  - Any conflict with state or federal law? Mechanism in place for addressing taking concerns?
  - For instance, does it involve Impact Fees? Not allowed under MS law.
- Develop clear recommendations for achieving objectives
SUGGESTED COMPONENTS OF ORDINANCE

1. Statement of purpose:
   • Give reasons for why ordinance is being adopted.

2. Definitions:
   • Define terms relevant to the ordinance.

3. Scope:
   • Establish geographic applicability of ordinance.

4. Requirements:
   • Sets out the specifics of what the ordinance is requiring.
• Kent County, MD

• The purpose of this section is to encourage the protection of rapidly eroding portions of the shoreline in the County by public and private landowners.

• When such measures can effectively and practically reduce or prevent shoreline erosion, the use of nonstructural shore protection measures shall be encouraged to conserve and protect plant, fish, and wildlife habitat.

• The purpose is to protect from erosion and conserve habitat.
DEFINE IMPORTANT TERMS

- Living Shorelines example:

- Brevard County, Florida:
  - Defines living shorelines as “erosion management techniques, such as the strategic placement of plants, stone, sand, and other structural and organic materials, that are used primarily in areas with low to moderate wave energy, and are designed to mimic natural coastal processes.”

- Clear definitions make it easier for regulators to enforce and easier to understand by property owners and developers.
Because at the end of day, no one wants to be in this situation.

Photo of August flooding in Baton Rouge, Louisiana
CONTACT INFORMATION

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