

Improv is the medium for climate change discourse



I've got great news. There's clarity around what we residents of Miami-Dade County can do about the ongoing dilemma of climate change. I know, I know, you're overwhelmed. There are too many options already, from recycling to driving an electric car to Meatless Mondays to, like me, having no kids. And the scenarios about the future, and what's going to happen when, are vague.

All this can leave the most well-meaning citizens paralyzed and hand-wrung. It can make your brain want to kick the can down the road, and it can fill you with existential angst.

But I got it. I've got the thing that can transform this dizzying array of variables into something we can work with. It's as practical and elegant as it is simple: Say "yes!" to sea level rise.

That's right, welcome sea level rise with open arms. What on earth, you ask?

Well, because by doing so, we free our brains to tackle the actual work of protecting our individual and collective assets, including our homes and businesses, and the costly infrastructure that keeps it all afloat.

By saying "yes!" to sea level rise, you align yourself with others who've already done so and generate more of the forward momentum our community desperately needs.

Just Say Yes

Written by Kim Ogren, BT Contributor
May 2019

Many cities in Miami-Dade have followed through with the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Compact recommendation to incorporate its unified sea level projections into their plans.

Broward County has taken the next step to adopt the projections *by ordinance*, along with a “future conditions” map. By embracing a future scenario to this degree, as a matter of law, the Broward County Commission made community engagement and decision making more productive. It has created the opportunity to ask the next sets of questions, like where to put the pump stations and when.

You’re probably familiar with one of the first rules of improv: “Yes, and...” You agree first, and then you add another line. The premise is that by accepting and working with what’s offered, you not only move the narrative forward, you also improve the collaboration and creativity. In June 2018, as part of its “Science and the Arts” series, the *Washington Post* examined the secrets of improvisation and found that in live performance, “comedians draw on their training to focus on listening, openness, and persistence.”

With climate change, a new style of decision making is required of our city leaders. Training them and ourselves the same way improv comics learn can help habituate creative thinking and reduce reliance on “political will” to make something happen.

The private sector is already banking on sea level rise projections. I learned how much a few weeks ago, at the third annual sea level rise conference hosted in Miami by the law firm Hinshaw and Culbertson. There I met one of the speakers, Nancy Watkins, a principal with Millman-San Francisco, the firm in charge of redesigning the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

Ultimately, NFIP 2.0 will better reflect risk and manage liabilities to achieve savings for residents and cities. “I answer some questions so that we can ask the next set of questions,” says Watkins. “And so, measuring the risk doesn’t solve the problem, but it defines it better.”

Flip the script to climate change, and you can create an entirely new conversation. Embrace some clarity for now.

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I also heard Jennifer Jurado, Broward County's chief resilience officer, point out that the sea level rise projections "are not self-actualizing." It's essential, she adds, to translate the future conditions map into regulatory requirements so public investments will meet the new standards. The sooner cities line up on this, the better. "We can't afford a single dollar not to be invested in this effort," she says.

And as is the case in southeast Florida, where our lives are inextricably linked to our built and natural environment, and the investments we've made in them, saving money means saves lives.

Here are some of the unified projections; now run them through your own personal scenario:

"In the short term, sea level rise is projected to be 6 to 10 inches by 2030 and 14 to 26 inches by 2060 (above the 1992 mean sea level). In the long term, sea level rise is projected to be 31 to 61 inches by 2100.

"For critical infrastructure projects with design lives in excess of 50 years, use of the upper curve is recommended, with planning values of 34 inches in 2060 and 81 inches in 2100."

Once you think about where you want to be in 2030 or 2060, just "yes, and ..." your way to City Hall, and ask the staff for a copy of Broward's ordinance. Ask your council members to do the same thing. Then turn down the noise, and get on to more important matters, like your pocketbook and your city's.

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