

## Hurricane Sandy Propels Boston toward Climate Adaptation

Kat Friedrich

BOSTON - Stories from Hurricane Sandy have motivated Boston's business and civic community to accelerate its preparation for emergencies related to climate change. A new report, "[Building Resilience in Boston: 'Best Practices' for Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience for Existing Buildings](#)," outlines experts' recommendations for property owners.

Before Hurricane Sandy, Boston leaders were already engaged in adaptation planning, said Vivien Li, president of The Boston Harbor Association. But she said the hurricane's devastating impact on New York City has motivated Boston's civic leaders to strengthen their actions.

"We looked at what would have happened if Sandy had hit Boston five hours earlier at high tide," Li said. "Close to seven percent of Boston's landmass would have been flooded. If you take that information... and project it out to 2050 or 2100, depending on what numbers you use, parts of the flat of Beacon Hill and Back Bay and Cambridge would have been flooded."

Li is a member of the Boston Green Ribbon Commission Climate Preparedness Working Group, which funded the new report together with the Boston Society of Architects.

"Property owners need to look at their own vulnerability... sooner as opposed to later," Li said.

"Now's the time, don't wait," said Jim Newman, coauthor of the report and director of metrics and principal at Linnean Solutions.

Boston is an old city with many properties close to sea level, said Sarah Slaughter, coauthor of the report and president of The Built Environment Coalition. Many areas within Boston were originally wetlands and have been filled for construction.

Climate change increases the risks of some weather and safety hazards. Slaughter and Newman agreed winter storms and summer heat are two of the main concerns. They encouraged property owners to develop emergency plans and anticipate power outages.

Building owners can take steps to protect tenants from heat and cold, Slaughter and Newman said. Planting shade trees can shield buildings. Allowing closed windows to be opened on hot days can provide relief. And adding high-quality windows and good insulation can protect tenants during winter.

During weather emergencies, building systems may fail. But if building owners move mechanical equipment above the first floors of buildings and provide locations for generators to plug in, tenants may still be able to have electricity.

Newman and Slaughter recommended that building owners list the essential services they want to preserve during weather emergencies and make sure they have planned for them. For example, providing water at the fifth or sixth floors of high-rises can help people at the top floors survive during extended power outages.

How can building owners fund these upgrades? Newman and Slaughter suggested leveraging funding from Mass Save and drawing on tax incentives. But there seem to be relatively few financial resources available in Boston to help property owners with modest incomes retrofit their homes in preparation for climate change.

Business groups are discussing the report's implications and making plans to spread the word, Newman said. He added that the City of Boston has expressed interest in bringing the report to neighborhood organizations.