

Managed Retreat in Coastal MA: Perspectives + Recommendations



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Background & Context

- 20+ inches of SLR between 2020-2050
- 43+ inches of SLR between 2020-2070



Methods



Acushnet	Amesbury	Aquinnah*	Barnstable*
Berkley	Beverly	Boston*	Bourne*
Braintree	Brewster*	Chatham*	Chelsea*
Chilmark*	Cohasset*	Danvers*	Dartmouth
Dennis*	Dighton	Duxbury	Eastham*
Edgartown*	Essex*	Everett	Fairhaven
Fall River	Falmouth	Freetown	Gloucester*
Gosnold * **	Hanover	Harwich*	Hingham
Hull*	Ipswich	Kingston*	Lynn
Manchester-by-the-Sea*	Marblehead	Marion*	Marshfield*
Mashpee*	Mattapoissett*	Nahant	Nantucket*
New Bedford*	Newbury*	Newburyport*	Oak Bluffs*
Orleans*	Plymouth*	Provincetown*	Quincy
Revere*	Rockport*	Rowley	Salem*
Salisbury*	Sandwich*	Saugus	Scituate
Seekonk*	Somerset	Swampscott	Swansea*
Tisbury*	Truro*	Wareham	Wellfleet*
West Tisbury*	Westport*	Weymouth*	Winthrop*
Yarmouth*			

**Indicates a municipality with at least one survey response*

***No contact information was available for any municipal representative, though regional representatives did participate*

Findings

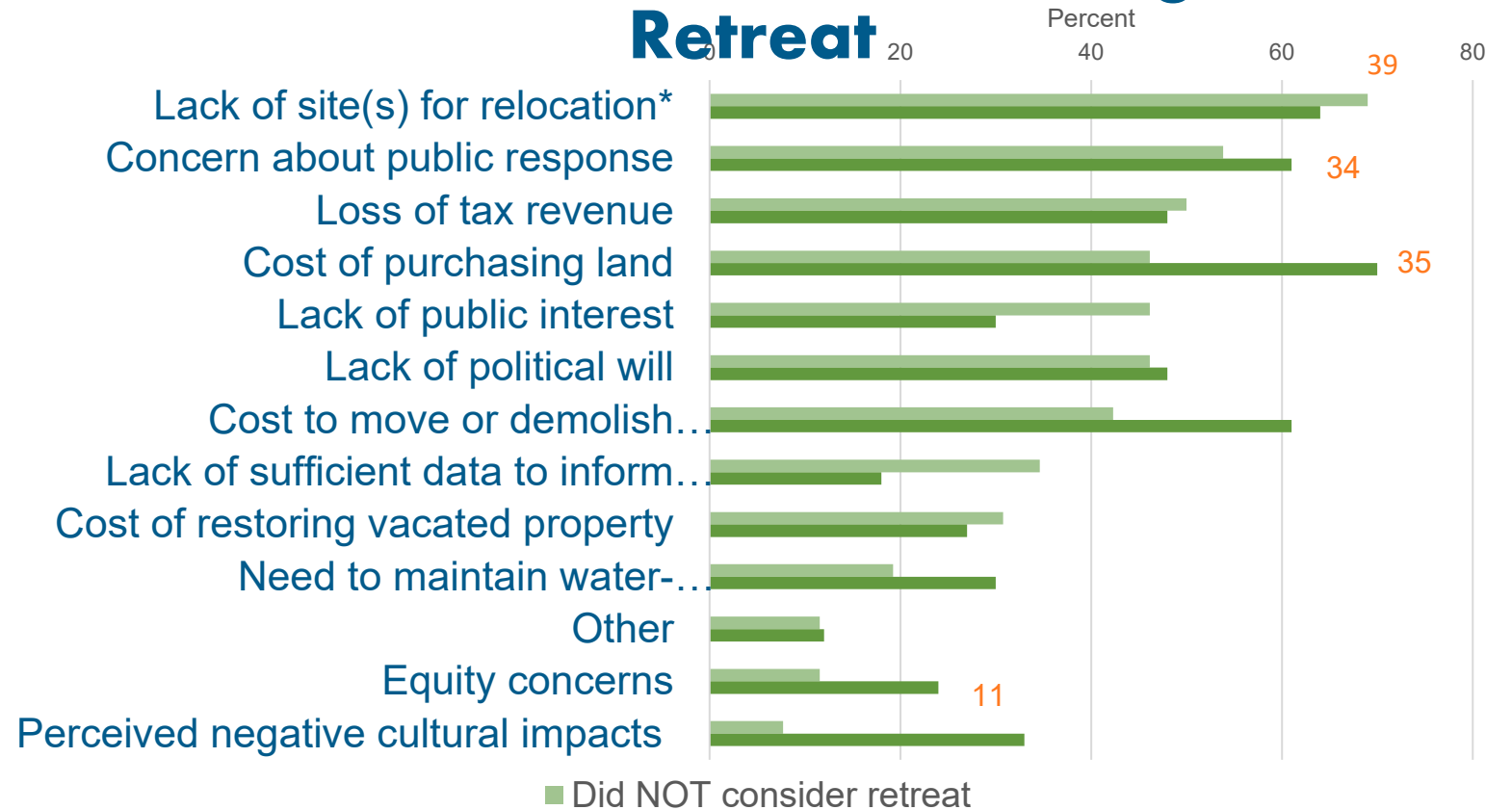


**“Managed retreat” is
being “considered”,
but...**

17+ municipalities considered managed retreat
15 did NOT consider retreat
9 municipalities where responses conflicted

Findings

Perceived Barriers to Managed Retreat





Triggers for movement will only be after a **catastrophic event**, and not proactive

The town has several **higher more immediate priorities**, in reaction to wastewater and housing needs...so we are not currently being proactive on managed retreat options

With only a few square miles of land, we **intend to defend it to the maximum extent possible**

Shorefront property is the majority of our **tax base**

We have considered it and have no plans to implement it this century. We are instead looking at **defenses and managing the shoreline**

The 'Powers that Be' are not willing to seriously address Climate Change, and how it is affecting our town

It would have to be **regulation driven**

There is **no place** to retreat

Cost to acquire land is too high; housing is a hot commodity that defeats threats to perceived long-term horizon issues and perception that flood insurance will be there to help restore/elevate homes

Findings

Anticipated Benefit of Managed Retreat

Responses
(N=38)

Reduced flooding of built structures

27

Reduced maintenance of municipal
infrastructure

25

Enhanced natural resources

25

Reduced demand on emergency response
services

20

Preservation and/or creation of new public
space

15

Other

4

Addresses equity issue(s)

3

No benefits were anticipated

1

Findings

Tool/Resource	Highly Interested	Somewhat Interested	Not Interested
Funding strategies/Budget tools (e.g., grants to purchase land)	41	12	2
Community education/outreach/engagement tools	38	14	3
Regulatory tools (e.g., model bylaws)	36	14	5
Trainings and workshops	28	20	7
Legal assistance	26	22	7
Planning assistance	25	27	4
Participating in a community of practice (e.g., quarterly meetings to share lessons learned, resources, etc.)	20	27	8
Other	4	5	15

Terminology

Challenges

- Lack of understanding about what the term means
- Association of “retreat” with failure or giving up

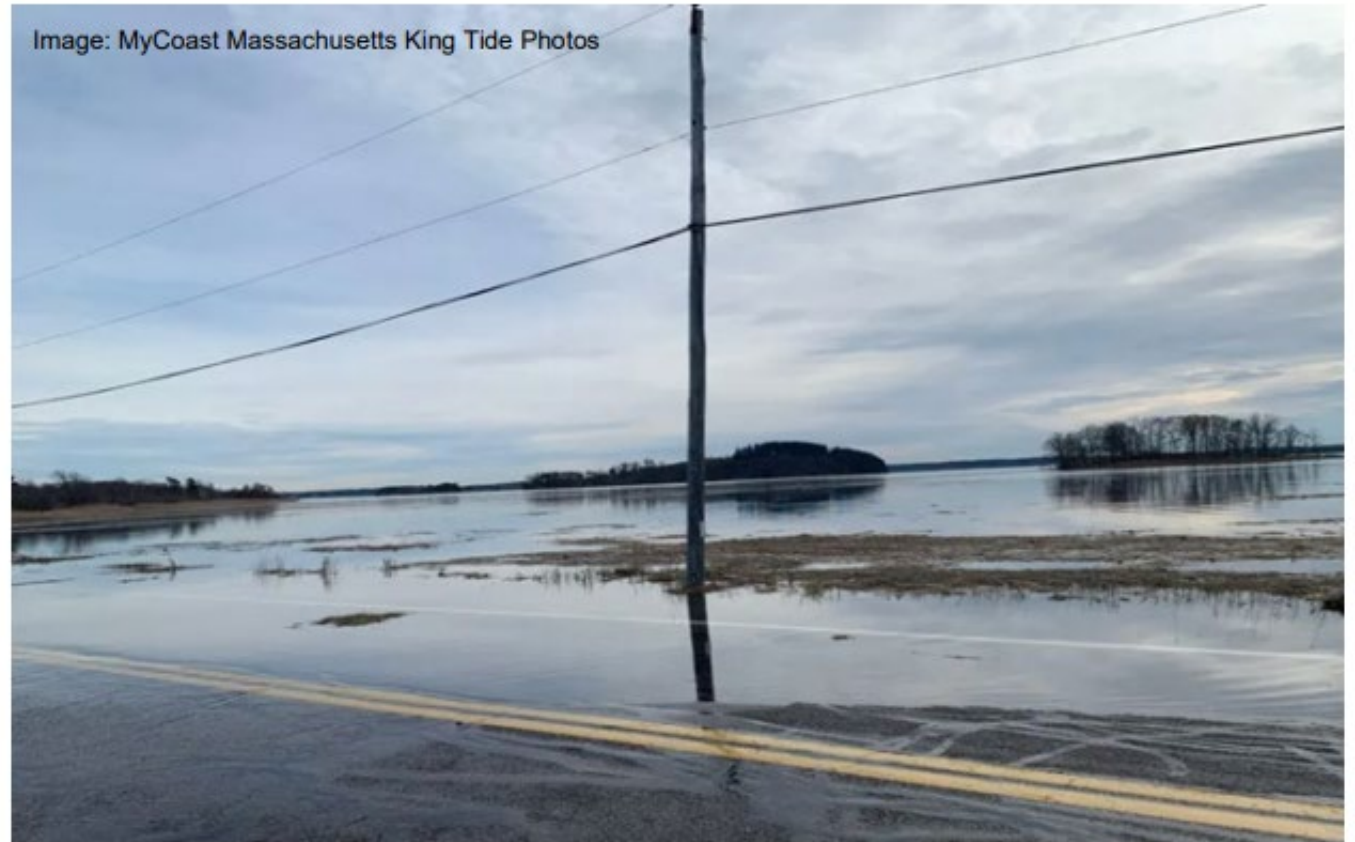


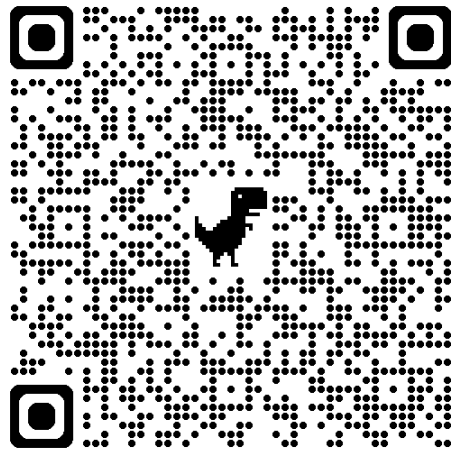
New Barriers

- Perception that retreat is more difficult than other options
- Retreat evokes emotions including doubt, fear, rage, loss, mistrust, frustration, and denial

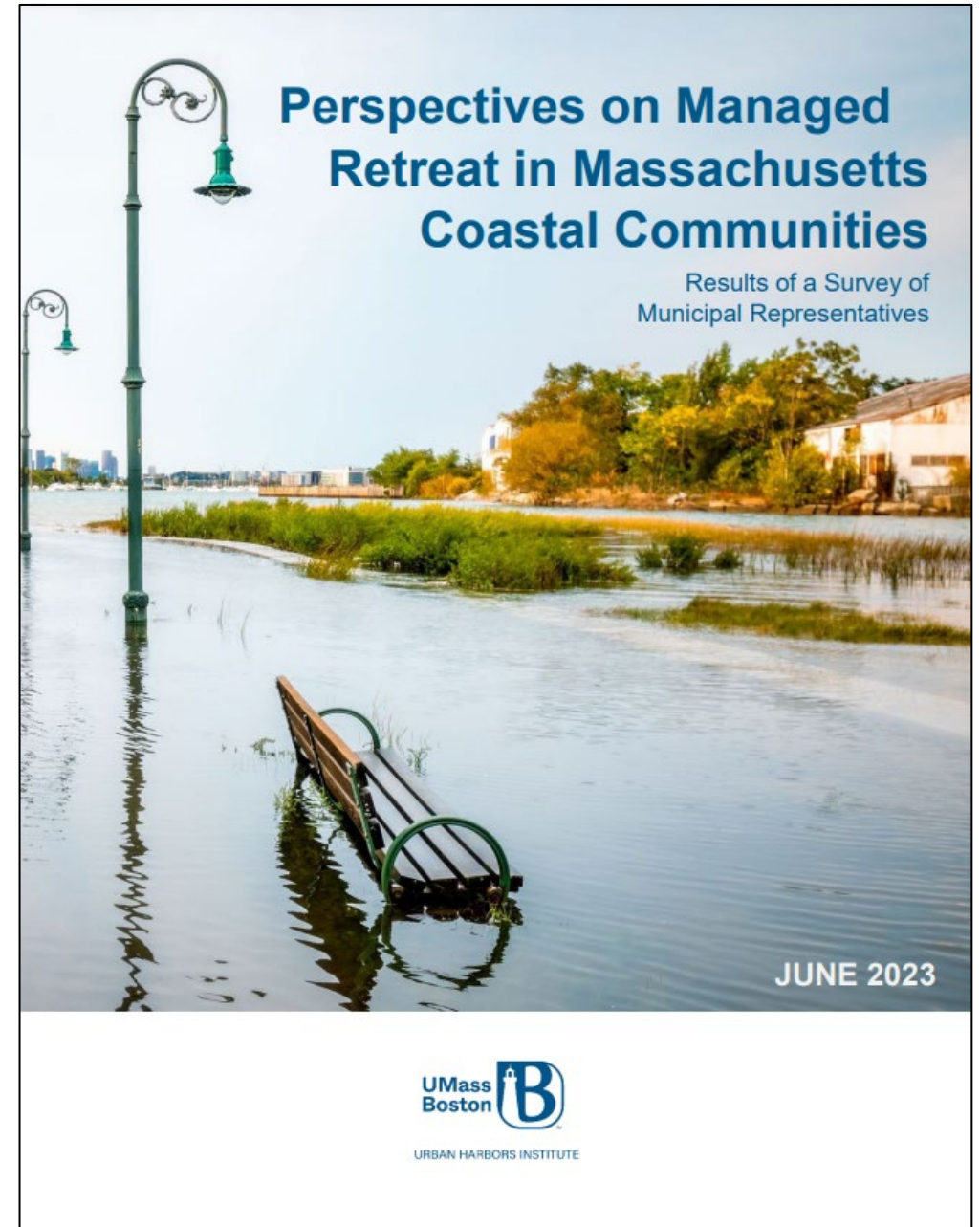
Recommendations

- Funding assistance
- Accurate, accessible, trusted information
- Equity
- Planning horizons





www.umb.edu/uhi - Under “Completed Projects”
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New Grant!

Proactive Planning for Collaborative, Equitable Retreat & Relocation in Massachusetts

Funded by: The Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management

Ends: June 2026

Team:

- The Nature Conservancy, Urban Harbors Institute, and Communities Responding to Extreme Weather (CREW)
 - Launch” (expand and continue to support) a coastwide peer learning network focused on relocation (this group!)
 - Develop a resource database to support practitioners and partners in making decisions around relocation
 - Host public engagement events and a public-facing report focused on community and resident perceptions of managed retreat in Massachusetts.

More Details:

Peer Learning Network:

- Increase number of MA environmental professionals with information, tools, and relationships to take action to incorporate relocation as a tool
- Conduct 5 meetings with regional experts to share their knowledge in presentation and interactive conversation
- Proactive Relocation Workshop: 2-day in person event to provide training in the critical skills and knowledge needed to incorporate retreat into plans

Developing Relocation & Retreat Planning Resource Database:

- Develop a resource library on managed retreat using emerging themes from literature review for others to use
- Complete database and identify information gaps and additional resources needed to plan for retreat and relocation; data gaps will be used to inform future work

More Details:

Community Engagement:

- Host in person (meetings, tabling, etc.) and virtual events to gather input from coastal residents and community members; compile results
- Focus on underrepresented and environmental justice communities

Report:

- Develop and present on report with all findings

Questions?

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