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Healey-Driscoll Administration Launches Statewide Coastal Resiliency Strategy

A new Chief Coastal Resilience Officer will lead the ResilientCoasts initiative, which will establish new Coastal Resilience Districts based on climate change impacts

BEVERLY – The Healey-Driscoll Administration today announced the launch of the ResilientCoasts initiative, a holistic strategy for addressing the impacts of climate change along the coastline of Massachusetts. In collaboration with the state’s 78 coastal communities, ResilientCoasts will pursue a multipronged approach to identify regulatory, policy, and funding mechanisms to develop focused long-term solutions. Notably, the initiative will be led by a new Chief Coastal Resilience Officer within the Office of Coastal Zone Management. Working with communities, this team will establish Coastal Resilience Districts based on their unique climate impacts. The development of a coastal resilience strategy is a priority action within the state’s [ResilientMass Plan](#). The announcement took place at the Carriage House in Beverly.

"Climate change poses a very real threat to our coastal way of life, but it also presents a unique opportunity for us to build communities that are safer and more equitable for years to come," said **Governor Maura Healey**. "This is a matter of fiscal responsibility. Our coastal cities and towns have been weathering erosion, sea level rise, and extreme storms without a holistic state strategy. Homeowners, small businesses, and municipal governments deserve a regional approach to this problem. Our ResilientCoasts initiative will allow us to bring the full powers of the state to deliver real solutions to our coastlines."

"Governor Healey and I both hail from coastal communities and we feel strongly about the need for both strong statewide support and local collaboration," said **Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll**. "As Mayor of Salem, our city saw a need for state, regional,

and local collaboration on tough coastal issues. ResilientCoasts will provide this framework to harness the expertise of our communities to implement a long-term vision for our coasts.”

“We’re not going to stand by while a major storm wrecks people’s homes, or coastal erosion pulls down seawalls out from under our small businesses,” said **Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Rebecca Tepper**. “We have some tough questions ahead – where will it be safe to build? How can we preserve our historical landmarks? What infrastructure will withstand ever worsening weather? We’re taking on some of the difficult aspects of coastal resiliency, and we’re doing it in partnership with municipalities, lawmakers, academics, and advocates to build consensus along the way.”

“Now is the time for action,” said **Climate Chief Melissa Hoffer**. “This initiative will allow us to make prudent cost-saving investments that protect our communities and coastal ecosystems. The state’s 2022 Climate Assessment identifies reduction in state and municipal revenues as an “urgent impact” of climate change with a “major level of consequence.” As we pull out all the stops to reduce emissions, these investments will help municipalities and the state save on climate response costs in the long term.”

Massachusetts is planning for sea level rise by up to 2.5 feet by 2050 compared to 2008 if global emissions are not significantly reduced. Both tidal and storm-related flooding are projected to increase. By 2070, statewide annual average damages to coastal structures could be more than \$1 billion per year. The total value of structures within the floodplain for the current 100-year return period coastal storm is about \$55 billion, of which about \$40 billion is residential, \$12 billion is industrial, and \$2.5 billion is commercial. The number of vulnerable infrastructure assets and anticipated loss will grow over time as rising seas expand the coastal floodplain. Of the nearly 2.5 million people that live within the 78 coastal communities in Massachusetts, approximately 55 percent of the population lives within Massachusetts-designated Environmental Justice Block Groups, representing communities of color, low-income populations, and/or communities facing language barriers.

Governance Structure

The Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) will lead the ResilientCoasts initiative. A newly created Chief Coastal Resilience Officer position will oversee this effort and provide cross-agency coordination. CZM’s unique experience and expertise with technical assistance, funding, partnerships, and regulatory review to address coastal threats will allow the administration to act swiftly in mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Coastal Resilience Districts

Massachusetts has more than 1,500 miles of coastline, spanning salt marshes, beaches, rocky shores, dunes, ports and harbors, and residential and commercial

areas along the shores of 78 cities and towns. These geographic differences, along with variations in development, habitats, and other factors, underly the need for a regional approach to coastal resilience. A key component of ResilientCoasts will be the delineation of Coastal Resilience Districts, geographic regions that share similar landscape characteristics and face similar climate hazards. This initiative will delineate these districts in 2024 and then collaborate with communities to implement tailored resilience policy and regulatory strategies and leverage multiple state and federal funding opportunities.

Resilience Strategies

The ResilientCoasts initiative is a priority within the state's 2023 ResilientMass Plan. It will identify resilience strategies for both statewide implementation and strategies tailored to each region's unique vulnerabilities. Statewide, CZM will work with relevant state agencies to evaluate building standards, financing strategies, and scientific best practices, among other pursuits. The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency will lead an evaluation of a statewide buyout program. In addressing the concerns of each Coastal Resilience District, CZM will work with communities to assess strategies such as nature-based solutions, dredging, coastal nourishment, roadway elevation, and managed retreat.

Financing & Federal Funding

A key aspect of ResilientCoasts will be identifying innovative new financing mechanisms for climate resilience projects. New infrastructure and changing approaches to development will require reliable funding streams that are structured to incentivize coastal resilience. Already, CZM has led the effort to pursue federal funds through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Resilience Regional Challenge. The application requests \$73 million and was developed in partnership with 55 community partners. The administration will work with the Legislature on any recommended approaches.

Modern Regulatory Framework

Massachusetts has the nation's oldest coastal and waterways protection program. In order to support potential resilience strategies, CZM will work in parallel with relevant agencies to identify updates to state wetlands, waterways, the building code, and Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act regulations to better address the climate challenges of today. The agencies within the EEA will evaluate changes that will:

- Support nature-based solutions for coastal erosion and flood protection and resilience;
- Streamline the permitting process for coastal restoration and resilience projects;

- Ensure that permitting and regulatory processes consider projected future sea level rise and precipitation levels that are based on the latest science and accurately reflect the changing climate.

Cross-Government and Stakeholder Engagement

Community engagement will be critical to the development of ResilientCoasts. A Coastal Resilience Task Force with representation from communities, businesses, scientists, community-based organizations, and environmental advocates will be created as part of the team to support the development of a strategy that effectively and equitably meets the needs of coastal communities. State agencies will engage in the effort through the state's inter-agency ResilientMass Action Team.

Statements of Support

Adam Chapdelaine, Executive Director, Massachusetts Municipal Association:

The MMA applauds the Healey-Driscoll Administration for launching this bold and timely effort and looks forward to representing the needs and interests of local government as this critical initiative gets underway."

Bud Ris, Senior Advisor, Boston Green Ribbon Commission:

"The Commonwealth's Resilient Coast strategy comes as a welcome initiative at a critical time – just as we need to move more briskly from planning to implementation. It can build off of the good work done already through the Climate Ready Boston program and the Municipal Vulnerability Plans (MVPs) developed by other coastal communities up and down the coast. Hopefully, we'll get a clear set of priorities for the decades ahead, along with various strategies to implement them."

Kathy Abbott, President and CEO, Boston Harbor Now:

"By providing leadership and coordination at the highest levels, ResilientCoasts is a critical milestone in the Commonwealth's efforts to accelerate implementation of climate adaptation. We look forward to continued partnerships with EOEEA, CZM, and the new Chief Coastal Resilience Officer on policy, governance, and funding initiatives while creating a healthier, more resilient and inclusive coast."

Katie Theoharides, President and CEO, The Trustees:

"As the stewards of 120 miles of Massachusetts coastline, the Trustees see first-hand the impact of increasingly powerful storms and coastal erosion and has been working to pilot nature-based solutions that build resilient coastal ecosystems. We applaud this effort by the Healey-Driscoll administration to work with communities and partner organizations to better prepare and respond to the growing threat posed by climate

change, and we look forward to partnering with the new Chief Coastal Resilience Officer to promote nature-based solutions to help communities become more resilient to climate impacts.”

Alli Gold Roberts, Senior Director, State Policy, Ceres:

"Investors and other financial actors have long recognized the severe risks facing coastal communities from climate change. Massachusetts residents and business owners are experiencing those risks first-hand, and more intensely with each passing storm. Ceres commends the Healey administration for prioritizing the challenges facing the Commonwealth's coastline, and looks forward to the innovative solutions the ResilientCoasts initiative promises to deliver."

Alison Bowden, Interim State Director, The Nature Conservancy:

“With its proactive approach to addressing climate concerns on a state level, the Healey-Driscoll Administration is becoming a standout nationally for climate policy that addresses issues holistically, creatively, and equitably. This latest announcement focuses on coastal resiliency which has statewide implications for Massachusetts. By creating a new Chief of Coastal Resilience and a task force that includes the voices of science, the administration clearly has a vision for robust outcomes. Leaning into partners to collaborate is essential to transforming resilience policies, funding, and strategies. And, by focusing on nature-based climate solutions to protect intact habitats, shorelines, and ecologically vital landscapes, we can make a significant difference in protecting our coastal areas against sea level rise and erosion so they can endure and be more resilient.”

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