

RISING SEAS IMPERIL HAMPTONS HOMES

By Rick Murphy

No matter what your stance on global warming is, the fact is irrefutable: the oceans are rising, and the rate is accelerating. That means waterfront structures are imperiled, and local municipalities must rethink how they are going to cope with the phenomena — and

rethink it fast.

A recent study by the Union of Concerned Scientists pegged Southampton as the epicenter of a problem that also plagues parts of New Jersey, Central California, and Florida: coastal flooding. The study concluded parts of Southampton have "a high likelihood of chronic

flooding in the next 12 years which could result in significant property tax loss."

Add East Hampton, especially Montauk, to the list, suggested Kevin McAllister, the executive director of the environmental group Defend H2O. The Montauk downtown area is particularly vulnerable. "You have to talk about relocation of the motels and restoration of the dunes," he said.

"Government has been slow in engaging on sea level rise," McAllister said. "Long Island has experienced a four-inch rise during the past 40 years, but Department of Environmental Protection models indicate that figure could accelerate quickly to an 11-to-30-inch rise projected for the next 40. Monumental changes are coming."

The group found that sea level rise, driven primarily by climate change, puts hundreds of thousands of homes and commercial properties in the U.S. at risk of being flooded at least 26 times per year by 2030. The incessant deluges would depreciate property values, erode infrastructure, and eventually diminish tax revenue, causing local credit ratings to sour and making it more difficult to finance projects needed to contend with rising sea levels.

"We think that the risks to the local tax base means a vicious cycle can kick in," Erika Spanger-Siegfried, one of the report's authors, told Bloomberg.com last week.

McAllister said it's time to rethink

Federal Emergency Management Agency insurance, which currently subsidizes insurance for owners of waterfront homes. "There are places in Westhampton Dunes that have been rebuilt five to seven times," he said. "It should be one and done. After that you move on."

"It's time for elected officials to process the science, recognize the imminent changes, and facilitate courageous decisions which prioritize recreational beaches, functioning wetlands and public access," he added.

"We're seeing a ramp-up of the level of surge caused by some of these nor'easter's," McAllister said, calling the storms "facilitators of erosion."

Almost no municipality stands to lose as much money from climate change as Southampton.

The affluent Long Island town — where the median price of a home for sale is almost \$2 million — has the second highest level of its property-tax revenue at risk among municipalities, with a high likelihood of chronic flooding in the next 12 years, according to data gathered by the Union of Concerned Scientists. Only Central Coast, California had more.

The states of Florida and New Jersey have the most to lose, according to the report, as over-development crowds the beach towns where thousands have made their homes. Miami Beach in Florida and Ocean County, New Jersey, are particularly susceptible.