

COMMUNITY PLANNING IN MANAGED RETREAT: Environmental Justice and Cultural Heritage in Coastal Adaptation

ABSTRACT

Confronted with a need to achieve coastal resilience, international and interdisciplinary academic, advocacy, and policy-making bodies have proposed a range of disaster risk reduction strategies. However, existing mechanisms for retreat generally focus on ad hoc methods—prioritizing risk reduction in isolation from broader societal goals. The consequence of such unplanned retreat is an inequitable and unsustainable model of community relocation. This white paper will focus specifically on the recent shift in managed retreat discourse toward equitable and strategic planning and the role that environmental justice, community planning and cultural heritage play in the adaptation process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A reconceptualization of managed retreat could make it a strategic and viable option for many communities, instead of a last resort. Policymakers should play a large role in creating equitable options for managed retreat as they are best positioned to ensure strategies integrate community planning and a means of maintaining important social connections—all while still providing desirable jobs, public services, and affordable housing. International policy literature on managed retreat has called out the preservation of cultural heritage as a critical concern for community relocation planning. Related research has pointed to the pivotal role that heritage and cultural conservation play in community resilience and social cohesion. In considering strategies for managed retreat in the future, access to climate-related knowledge in advance of extreme weather events, as well as community-led action and participatory processes, are critical.