



Tishman Environment
and Design Center



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Structural inequities and disinvestment take the spotlight in discussion of sea level rise

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*On a day dedicated to discussing
and planning for sea level rise,
Tishman Center affiliated faculty
Mindy Fullilove broadened the
conversation, and challenged*

*planners in the region to recognize and address the role of racism in society.*The [Regional Plan Association](#) released a new study: [Under Water: How Sea Level Rise Threatens the Tri-State Region](#) at a [conference at The New School](#) on December 6th. The study focuses on the impacts that as little as one foot of Sea Level Rise could have on the states of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. The conference featured municipal, county, and state officials; academics; and non-profit professionals to discuss long-term climate adaptation strategies that can be utilized in the New York Metropolitan Region. Panels focused on what lies ahead, confronting long term adaptation, and governing for long term adaptation. Though the conference opened with a specific focus on sea level rise projections; the possible impacts on the region; and existing policies, plans, or projects to address the threat of flooding, the tenor of the day was changed at the opening of the second panel discussion. Moderated by [Ana Baptista](#), Chair of Environmental Policy and Sustainability Management, the panel titled “Confronting Long Term Adaptation: What is Needed?” began with comments from [Mindy Fullilove](#), Professor of Urban Policy and Health. Dr. Fullilove prefaced her remarks by saying, “The part of

nature I want to focus on is people...the crucial infrastructure for the world is people and how we get along.” Sharing post-election images of students protesting for “Education not deportation” at the University of Arizona, and a baseball dugout in New York defaced with a swastika and the words “Make America white again,” she continued, “The much bigger crisis that we are in, that’s going to govern everything about civil management of sea level rise is that we are in a crisis of hatred in the United States.” Dr. Fullilove offered a challenge to the group to interrogate our own practices and processes to ensure that we are not reproducing status quo inequalities and racism in our work, because she reminded the audience, “Insanity is when we do the same things over and over again and get the same results. If we want to be sane, we have to try something different.” She encouraged participants to be open to the out of the box thinking that is happening, particularly younger generations. As the discussion unfolded, Dr. Baptista asked the panel, “Can you share some insight or some examples of how we begin to tackle, not just at the surface level...but foundationally, some of the issues that you raised around racism, emotional responses and social cohesion, cumulative and cascading impacts, infrastructure, and incremental versus long-term

approaches?” Each panelist reflected on their unique perspectives, offering key challenges and opportunities for confronting the injustices and racism that works to exacerbate the threats that sea level will inevitably bring. Jeanne Herb, Associate Director of the Environmental Analysis and Communications Group at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, cited the power of information, and the importance of sharing reports that make data usable by decision makers. Bennett Brooks, a Senior Mediator at the Consensus Building Institute, shared examples of listening to people in communities facing sea level rise, and translating their emotional response to the threats to their community into theater or other forms of art. David Kooris from the State of Connecticut Department of Housing told anecdotes of successfully engaging citizens by establishing a storefront design center for municipal projects with an open door policy that allows the people who will be affected by sea level rise to speak directly to the consultants, designers, and planners working on projects to combat rising waters. Watch the full panel discussion below: Confronting Long Term Adaptation: What is Needed?

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