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# Property owners' share of cost should increase

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Written by **John Weingart**

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At a 1982 forum on Long Beach Island commemorating the 20th anniversary of the last major storm to wreak havoc on the Jersey Shore, panelists stressed that public policy toward coastal development should be determined only after a full acknowledgment of all costs and benefits.

Former Gov. Richard Hughes and Neil Frank, director of the National Hurricane Center, were among the speakers who agreed that the question was not *if* the weather would ever again lead to such damage, but only *when*.

Six weeks ago, they were proven correct. But while the issues raised by superstorm Sandy are not new, responding to them will require absorbing new data and re-evaluating previous assumptions. Here are five observations:

First, the number of people who have enjoyed the Shore since the 1962 storm obviously is much greater after 50 years than it was three decades ago. And many of the fond memories of vacations, weekends and day trips undoubtedly center around houses, boardwalks and roads built in risky — and perhaps now devastated — locations.

Second, we now know that shore protection can be effective. Preliminary assessments from Sandy show that homes and businesses located behind well-designed dune creation and beach nourishment projects fared far better than structures lacking that protection.

Third, with each project costing tens of millions of dollars, the federal government will be able to support few of them — particularly given the vast array of other needs competing for increasingly limited public funds,

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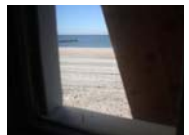
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Fourth, where shore protection can be funded, the responsibilities of the towns and individual property owners who would most directly benefit will need to increase. Local shares should include financial contributions and binding commitments to dune maintenance and the provision of meaningful beach access for non-residents.

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And, fifth, particularly in areas unlikely to gain enhanced shore protection, the prospect of new building and rebuilding will have to be reassessed by legislators, regulators and insurance providers as well as property owners.

The current law guaranteeing the right to rebuild was passed in 1993. It was, in part, a reaction against an earlier proposal aimed in the opposite direction that would have prohibited the reconstruction of any building more than 50 percent destroyed by a coastal storm.

As the climate continues to change and the sea level continues to rise, we can't count on the next hurricanes delaying their arrival for decades as Sandy did. Property owners and government officials, even as the right to rebuild may be maintained, should recognize that in many Shore locations to do so will not be the right decision.

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**John Weingart, associate director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, helped develop New Jersey's coastal management program while working in the state Department of Environmental Protection from 1975 to 1994.**

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