



CELEBRATING
55 YEARS

nerej

UMass.-Boston harbor barrier study - part one

September 21, 2018 - Construction Design & Engineering

Peter Papesch

Franziska Amacher

Vernon Woodworth

Critique of misleading conclusions

When it comes to sea-level rise, no solution of any significance can be limited to the City of Boston. The University of Massachusetts-Boston's (UMB) Feasibility of Harbor-Wide Barrier Systems report implies otherwise.

We believe that the UMB study team and the scoping Steering Committee overlooked - or ignored? - what was subsequently highlighted in a letter to the Boston Globe: Adel Foz, former director of planning and programming at Massport, asked "How can it not be worthwhile to spend \$11 billion to preserve well over \$80 billion in major real estate alone, not to mention other resources ..." and Ginger717 added "Not to mention \$422.7 billion in annual GDP from the Greater Boston economy alone, as of 2016".

It would be a mistake to take this report as the last word on the subject when, by their own admission, the authors did not consider "Direct physical damages to infrastructure and business, transportation, and service interruption losses not contemplated in this analysis." (UMB report, Appendix E, p. 210, footnote 3). The self-imposed limitations of the study determined its conclusions, to wit: "the methodology ... was presented to and deemed acceptable by the UMB project team and the Steering Committee based on ... budget and schedule allocated to model losses avoided"-Appendix D, pp. 209-210).

Readers should wonder why the Metro Mayors Alliance did not participate in the Steering Committee, why Lynn was left out of the study, and why the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and various other State of Massachusetts departments permitted their names to be listed as Steering Committee members. A more comprehensive look at the entire Metro Boston estuary in terms of resilience and mitigation factors would show more appropriate respect for the communities affected and the true scale of the problem. We look forward to such a study.

Ultimately, responsibility for the conclusions of the UMB study and their effects is shared by all participants, but to varying degrees. The professionals could only perform as directed and as financially supported. But the steering committee cannot escape its collective responsibility for conclusions which lull the communities of the Metro Boston estuary into complacency. The greatest harm, however, originates in the two articles of the Boston Globe (The next Big Dig? UMass study warns Boston Harbor barrier not worth cost or effort and Better than a wall: flood control that's sustainable, beautiful, and fair), which uncritically reported the conclusions of the UMB study and thereby invite these communities into complacency relative to the looming disasters for them of sea level rise and storm surges. This complacency could prevent residents, property owners and their representatives from truly coming to grips with the extent of the threat, with potentially disastrous

consequences.

Part two will appear in the October 19-25, 2018 CDE.

Peter Papesch, AIA, is a retired architect-developer & educator. Franziska Amacher, FAIA, NCARB, LEED AP, WBE, is owner of Amacher and Associates, Boston. Vernon Woodworth, FAIA, is a code consultant at AKF Group LLC, Boston and a faculty member of the the Boston Architectural College.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540