North Texas Can Manage Climate Risk with Resilience

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Texas will be among the states hardest hit by climate change, according to projections from the *Risky Business*[1] project, co-chaired by Michael R. Bloomberg, Henry Paulson and Tom Steyer. Extreme heat is expected to take a high toll in human lives and on worker productivity, agricultural yields, and electricity system performance. According to the National Climate Assessment[2], we are also expected to experience longer dry spells punctuated by heavy precipitation events and flooding.

Dallas and other North Texas cities are taking important steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the mitigation side of the climate coin. But we haven't focused much on the flip side of that coin: creating a region that can recover from extreme weather events and adapt to the change that has now become unavoidable. It's time for our region to start planning to be climate resilient.

The National Climate Assessment, in its evaluation of our Great Plains region, states that existing adaptation and planning efforts are inadequate to prepare for the magnitude of expected changes. A task force of state and local leaders, including Houston Mayor Annise Parker, delivered a report[3] to the federal government in November advising how it can support communities as they prepare for the impacts of climate change. The task force asserts that "anticipating and planning for these impacts now can reduce the harm and long-term costs of climate change to communities." Its report emphasizes the need to prepare the most vulnerable populations, who will be disproportionately affected.

That report provides an excellent template for a planning process by identifying seven areas where attention should be paid: land use and building design; public and private infrastructure investments; natural resources (like the Great Trinity Forest); human health; hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness and recovery; economic impacts; and public engagement.

There is also precedent to guide us. In Southeast Florida, Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Monroe Counties collaborated to evaluate common climate vulnerabilities and propose a set of responses[4]. This ongoing planning process is led by elected county officials, has engaged experts from the private and academic sectors, and has encouraged public participation. From 2005-2010, Vision North Texas, a coalition of private, public and academic sector leaders, used a collaborative public process to develop recommendations[5] about development patterns in our rapidly growing region.

There are some stirrings of climate resilience planning in Texas. The Austin City Council has directed its City Manager[6,7] to incorporate climate resilience into city budget and planning efforts and to perform vulnerability assessments for city infrastructure and operations. Transportation planners in the Austin area[8] and North Texas[9] are looking at vulnerabilities as well. Senator Rodney Ellis has introduced SB 77[10], which would require certain state agencies to publish climate adaptation plans. Dallas and El Paso are among the Rockefeller Foundation's *100 Resilient Cities*[11] cohort and now have Chief Resilience Officers.

However, this is not a job that can be left to government alone. Our local economy relies on key private sector assets and processes like physical plants, supply chains, and retail, commercial and industrial facilities. The expertise of the private and academic sectors, as well as the support of the philanthropic community, is needed. Public participation in the planning process is essential to build support for the proposed responses.

The Florida Compact is one of the most mature in this emerging field of climate resilience planning. It is an ongoing process, and its recommendations are not a mandate but "a living document" with options that governments may adopt based on their interests and vision for the future. Regional cooperation and political leadership have been key to its success.

Planning for the unavoidable consequences of climate change will be hard, but by creating a more climate resilient region, we will improve the quality of life for its residents, and that's good news.

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[1] http://riskybusiness.org/reports/fact-sheets/texas
[2] http://www.globalchange.gov/
[3] http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/task_force_report_0.pdf
[4] http://www.southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/
[5] http://www.visionnorthtexas.org/regional_summit/North_Texas_2050.pdf
[6] http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Sustainability/Climate/2013-11-21_Climate_Adaptation_Resolution.pdf
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[10] http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=84R&Bill=SB77
[11] www.100resilientcities.org