



HULL CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT

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The following freeboard* incentive is offered in the interests of protecting the health and safety of Hull citizens, preventing property damage, and reducing the need for costly emergency services during storm events.

“For residential and commercial building elevation, or new construction projects, building department permit fees will be reduced by \$500 (or by the cost of the permit, if lower than \$500) if an elevation certificate is provided to verify the building is elevated a minimum of two feet above the highest federal or state requirement for the flood zone. If the base flood elevation on the FEMA November 2008 draft map is higher than the current map, eligibility for the permit fee reduction will be based on the draft map. When an updated map is officially accepted, eligibility for permit fee reduction will be based on the newly approved map. The Building Commissioner will determine whether a permit application is eligible for this freeboard incentive.”

Background:

This proposal stems from the Town’s work with the StormSmart Coasts technical assistance grant we received from Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management. The grant focuses on helping cities and towns consider actions or policies that will help prepare for future increases in sea level rise. The relevant points are as follows.

- Neither the current nor the draft FEMA flood maps take in to account any amount of sea level rise. They are predictions based on today’s conditions.
- Tide gauge data for Boston shows that sea level rose 10 inches over the past 100 years. We don’t have comparable New England figures, but on a global level we know that sea level rose at a rate of .07 inch/year from 1961 to 2003 and .12 inch/yr from 1993 to 2003. That is, the rate of increase in sea level is increasing.
- The latest sea level rise predictions for the next 100 years, from the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), range from a low of 7 inches to a high of 23 inches. More recent data indicate that sea level rise is currently on a trajectory that would be at the high end of IPCC estimates. In fact, more recent data suggest that the IPCC estimates are conservative.
- The draft FEMA maps are a result of sophisticated engineering modeling, but we can’t be certain that they are 100% accurate. Much attention has been focused on areas where people believe the maps are overly conservative (the flood elevations are too high). However, it must be noted that it is also possible that the maps have underrepresented risk in some areas.
- One of the key predicted impacts of a warming climate is an increase in the frequency and intensity of coastal storms.
- Towns do not have the legal right to require that property owners build at elevations higher than the FEMA maps, or other state regulations require. It is, however, permissible to encourage owners to include freeboard in their projects.

*freeboard is the term used when buildings are elevated higher than required by the FEMA flood maps