

# **Sea Level Rise Planning:** *The Good, the Bad, the Ugly*

**Ed Spriggs**  
**Mayor Pro Tem**  
**City of Imperial Beach**



# **Key Discussion Points**

**Local Coastal Program (LCP) Process: Unclear  
Finish Line**

**The Managed Retreat (MR) Doctrine  
Exacerbates (Inflames?) Planning Challenges**

**Sea Level Rise (SLR) is a Community Survival  
Issue**

**Meaningful LCP Progress Should Trump  
Perfection**

# California Coastal Commission Primer

**Composition:** 15 members; 3 designated State agency heads; 6 at large and 6 by coastal district; Executive director, central and regional staff

**Mission:** To implement the Coastal Act and ensure that development in the coastal zone is consistent with the Act

**Method:** Ensure that localities have up to date Local Coastal Programs enabling them to make the coastal land use decisions locally subject to appeal to the Commission

# **Local Coastal Programs (LCPs)**

**LCPs can be thought of as the equivalent of General Plans for areas within the Coastal Zone.**

**Each LCP includes a land use plan and measures to implement the plan (such as zoning ordinances).**

**LCPs must be consistent with the policies of the Coastal Act**

**Until the Coastal Commission certifies an LCP, the Commission makes the final decisions on development in the Coastal Zone.**

# The IB Story is Similar to Other Coastal Cities

May 2020 Survey Conducted By Coastal Cities Group of the  
League of California Cities -- 22 Respondent Coastal Cities

Is SLR perceived as a threat to your community?  
**Yes 95%**

How has your city been impacted by SLR?  
**Moderate or no impact 91%**

How has your city addressed concerns related to SLR?  
**Armoring 30%; Managed Retreat 23%; Natural  
Shorelines, Dunes, Soft 20%; Sand 7%; Other 20%**

League of CA Cities, Coastal Cities Group Survey  
May 2020

## How Does Your City Plan to Address Properties at Risk?

Action	Public Infrastructure	Private Property
Protect	44%	44%
Relocate	31%	22%
No Plans Yet	25%	33%

## HAS YOUR CITY ADDRESSED SLR THROUGH THE LCP PROCESS?

**YES**, IN OUR COMPLETED LCP APPROVED BY THE CCC: **14%**

**YES**, IN OUR DRAFT LCP THAT IS STILL IN PROGRESS: **52%**

**NO**, BUT WE PLAN TO DEVELOP AN LCP THAT WILL ADDRESS SLR: **29%**

**NO**, AND WE HAVE NO PLANS AT THIS TIME TO DEVELOP A NEW OR AMENDED LCP: **5%**



San Diego Bay

Imperial Beach Pier

San Diego

Tijuana River  
Estuarine  
Research Reserve

Naval Base Coronado Naval  
Outlying Landing Field

Tijuana River

Tijuana

Las Playas de Tijuana

International Border

Tijuana River



# How We Arrived Here: A Summary

- 2015-16 SLR Vulnerability/Risk Analysis developed with CA Coastal Conservancy funding
- Draft report shared at public workshop on preparation for late 2015 El Nino flooding, something community familiar with
- High and positive community interest (standing room only with overflow outdoors)
- 2017 Imperial Beach decided to proceed with CCC and internal funding to update 1994 LCP
- 2018-20 LCP addressing key policies of climate change, sea level rise, resiliency went through numerous drafts, CCC staff reviews, and community workshops until funds ran out



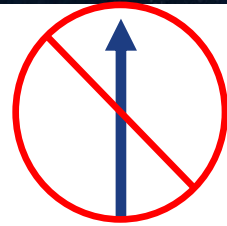
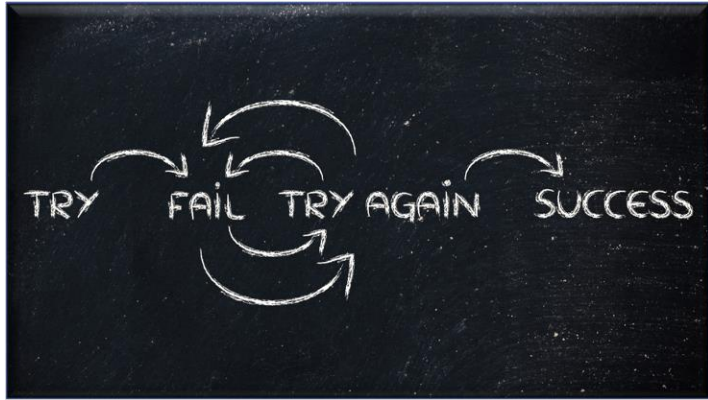
# LCP Issues Encountered

- Timing of CCC staff comments and additional issues raised during 3 cycles required backtracking:
- Emphasis on Managed Retreat negatively impacted all facets of public sentiment and involvement, displacing discussion of other adaptation strategies, adding need for additional workshops to calm the public and draining consultant time
- ESHA: City recognized its importance and included an analysis on ESHA; numerous comments received from CCC staff showed that ESHA could not be resolved within scope or budget (outreach, reports, mapping)
- Each policy, whether new or old, heavily scrutinized by both CCC staff and public with different objectives



# ***LCP Progress Made***

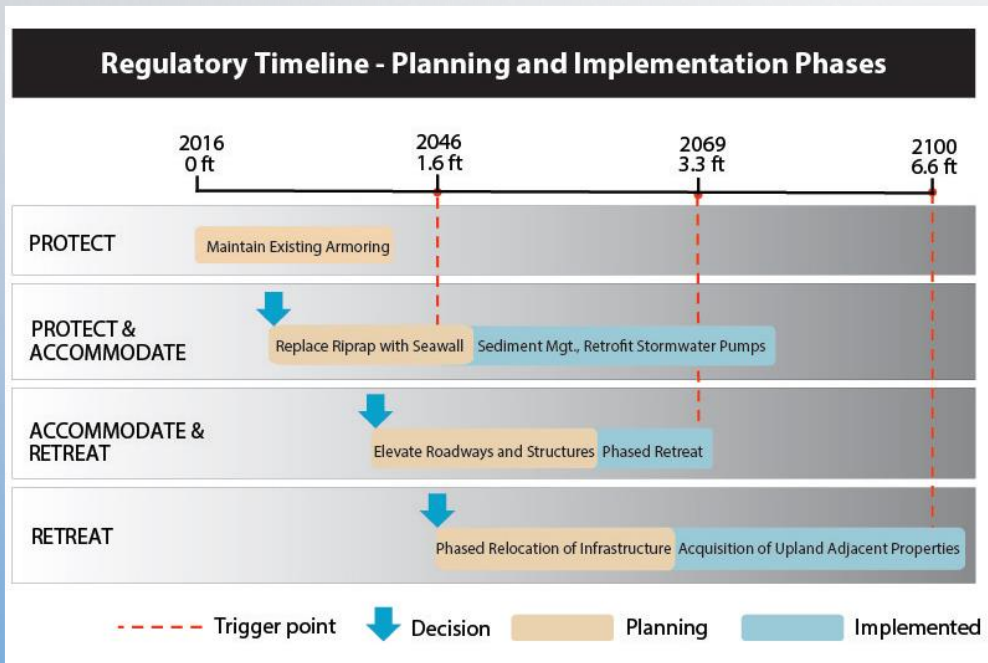
- Numerous policy updates included in Draft
  - Sea level rise
  - Shoreline protection
  - Water Quality protection
  - Climate Change
  - Environmental Justice
  - Community Health
  - Economic Prosperity and Ecotourism
  - Circulation/Mobility



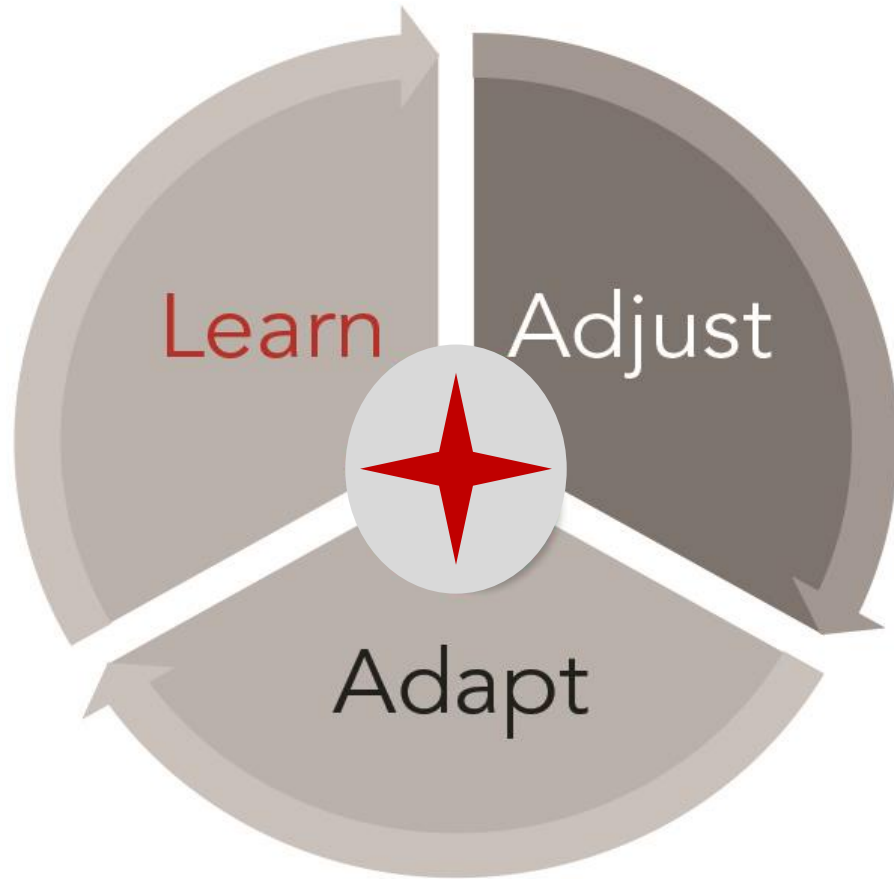




# SLR Adaptation Decisions Can and Need to be Phased Over Time



**Addressing  
Sea Level Rise  
is a process  
not a project**







# ***Imperial Beach has the Right to Survive***

*Recommendations  
for Managed  
Retreat, ESHA and  
other constraints  
essentially eliminate  
the financial viability  
of Imperial Beach*



San Diego Bay

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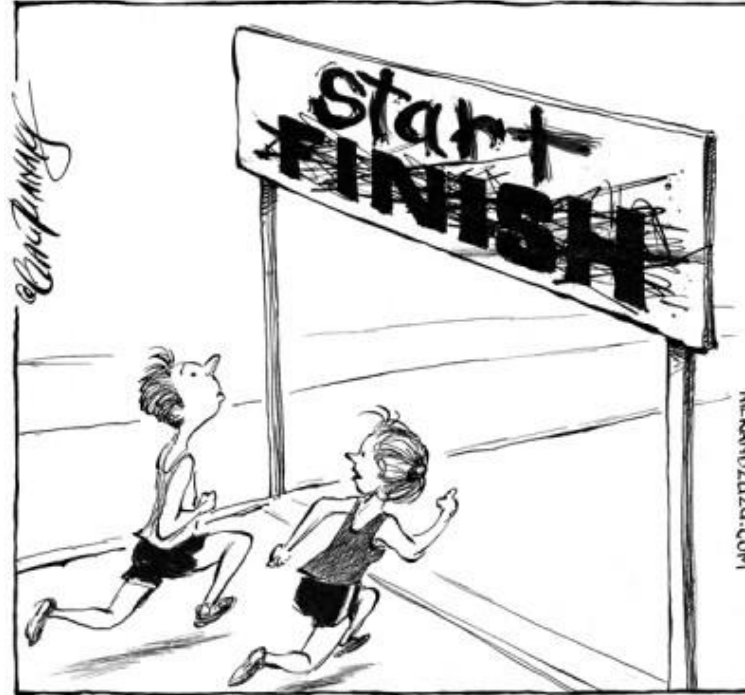
Tijuana River

If the preferred or only option is Managed Retreat and your community is surrounded on three sides by water, your community will be essentially eliminated over time both physically and economically.

# Experience Gained

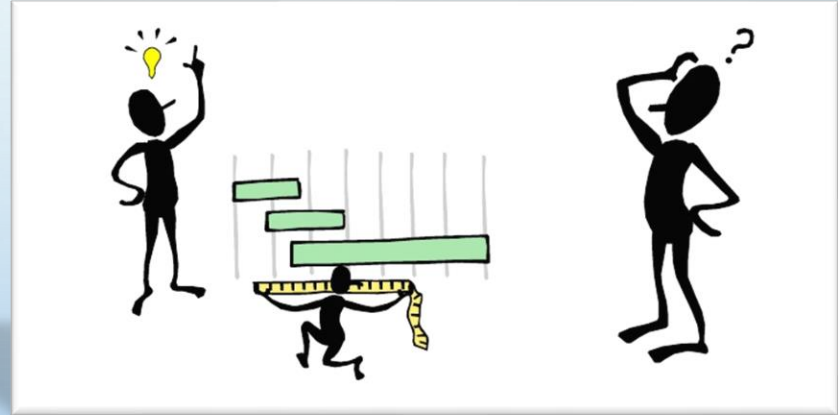
**New or revised comments late in the process are problematic:**

- Existing studies become stale
- Public trust is eroded
- Funding is exhausted
- Consultant scope of work is exceeded



# *Each LCP and Approval Process must be Unique*

- Many variables will result in cities making progress at a different pace
  - Available science
  - Funding
  - Community education and support
  - Competing public interests
  - Community challenges
  - Community vision and values
  - Physical attributes
  - Existing development patterns
  - Environmental and economic stability
- One set of rules for cities will result in **repetition & eliminate innovation**
  - A single process would be like every City having the same Zoning Ordinance





***The LCP Amendment Process should be modified to encourage more regular and incremental updates and to utilize a factual threshold approach to adaptation planning***

- ***Rather than a major time and financial undertaking, the amendment process for LCPs should be modified to encourage regular updates to accommodate:***
  - New studies and science
  - Changing climate of acceptance
  - More regular updates rather than massive change
  - **Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good – progress is positive!**
- ***Pre-selected adaptation options or strategies (such as Managed Retreat) should never be imposed***
  - A fact or event-based Threshold or Trigger approach can win public support, essential in a democracy
  - Thresholds can be tailored to local conditions that can vary widely within and between jurisdictions

“Patience is the calm acceptance that things can happen in a different order than the one you have in mind.”

David Allen

A photograph of the Imperial Beach sign at sunset. The sign consists of a dark metal frame with the words "IMPERIAL BEACH" in large, white, block letters. To the left of the sign are four tall, colorful arches in shades of purple, yellow, orange, and pink. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and long shadows. Palm trees are visible on both sides, and a building with outdoor seating is in the background.

IMPERIAL BEACH