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A BETTER CITY

Economy Needs a Consistent Approach to Climate Adaptation

Comprehensive Adaptation Management Plan Bill Passes Senate, Pends in House

By Rick Dimino | Special To Banker & Tradesman | Mar 4, 2018

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Whether it's a powerful nor'easter, a hurricane, a bomb cyclone, or just plain bad weather on steroids, climate change is hitting home and it's only going to get worse. The future of the commonwealth will be defined by how well we prepare now to meet the challenges that lie ahead. Massachusetts needs a consistent adaptation management plan and programs to help communities adapt.

As an organization whose mission is to ensure the continued economic vitality of this region, it's a no-brainer that A Better City joined the Climate Change Adaptation Coalition, a robust group of engineers, architects, planners and conservation organizations, to advance climate change adaptation in the commonwealth. A Better City also formalized our first-ever energy and environmental policy agenda this January and included strong and unequivocal support of the passage of the Comprehensive Adaptation Management Plan (CAMP) bill. The Senate has passed CAMP four times and it is now up to the House of Representatives to finally act.

To complement the successful mitigation efforts under the Global Warming Solutions Act, we now need a statutory requirement for adaptation policy and planning. While resiliency is the ability and agility of systems to bounce back from climate change impacts, adaptation is preparedness to prevent damage and destruction. Lack of climate adaptation across our community can cost businesses a lot. The price tags are in the billions for damage from flooding, extreme temperatures and sea level rise combined with disruptions to business continuity and lost outputs. This past fall, Moody's announced that it would be giving more weight to climate risk mitigation measures coastal communities are undertaking in its bond credit rating analysis. We can't afford to suffer these financial losses.

We applaud Gov. Charlie Baker for taking significant steps to build the first-stage resources, but this is insufficient to meet the real needs of the commonwealth. Baker signed Executive Order 569: Establishing an Integrated Climate Change Strategy for the Commonwealth in the fall of 2016, which requires the preparation of an integrated Climate Adaptation and Hazard Mitigation Plan and establishes the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program. In his most recent capital budget, Baker proposed an additional \$2 million to fund the programs and personnel necessary to maintain this incremental progress. But the breadth of the resources we put into adaptation need to match the extent of the long-term impacts of climate change; we need to codify the planning into law.

Rather than a patchwork of (often conflicting) state and local policies that stretch legal resources, consistent and predictable state policies could provide for reliable and stable regulatory approaches for investment. A streamlined set of climate adaptation strategies, policies and measures will manage these risks by assessing and protecting vulnerable populations, critical infrastructure, and emergency management systems. Most importantly, the CAMP bill requires that the actions of each state agency be consistent, to the maximum extent possible, with this resilience plan.

Consistency is critical.

The CAMP bill provides for a statewide climate adaptation plan and policy approach that ensures certainty and predictability for the commonwealth. The consistency provision would allow agency experts in their respective professional disciplines to design appropriate "climate-ready" policies that are integrated across state government. This applies only to the actions of state agencies and state authorities, ensuring that public taxpayer dollars are spent wisely.

Finally passing the CAMP bill will statutorily commit the state to sound analysis and management practices that take into account existing natural, built and economic characteristics of the commonwealth's most vulnerable areas. And the funding is already there. Baker has committed capital and operating budget funding to achieve the goals of EO569 and he has stated that climate change will be a continuing priority for his administration for public funding, programs and policy.

When it comes to action to protect our commonwealth from the effects of climate change, hopefully the fourth time's the charm in the House.

Rick Dimino is president and CEO of A Better City

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