

# Del Mar will stand its ground against managed retreat



Del Mar says managed retreat is not possible there, in part because of the high values of coastal property.  
(John Gibbins/San Diego Union-Tribune)

## City unanimously rejects 25 modifications proposed by state Coastal Commission

By **PHIL DIEHL**

OCT. 8, 2019 2:37 PM PT

DEL MAR —

The Del Mar City Council unanimously agreed Monday to stand its ground against managed retreat.

The city's resolve could be tested when its sea level rise adaptation plan is considered next week at the California Coastal Commission's meeting in Chula Vista.

Coastal Commission staffers have recommended their voting board reject Del Mar's plan unless the city adds 25 proposed modifications that Del Mar contends would be a "back door" to managed retreat. Council members said they will accept none of them.

"We have managed retreat lurking between these words," Councilwoman Terry Gaasterland said Monday during a discussion of the state agency's staff report.

As more and more scientific studies verify accelerating sea rise, the Coastal Commission is requiring cities to prepare for it. Del Mar is among the first cities in the state to complete a proposed adaptation plan and submit it to the state for certification.

A slow and calculated retreat is one of the ways governments can prepare for rising seas, higher tides and extreme storms. The strategy includes warning property owners and prospective buyers of the possibility they could be flooded, prohibiting new or additional development in threatened areas, and in some cases providing financial assistance to people who need to relocate out of harm's way.

However, after several years of meetings and studies, Del Mar has decided to reject managed retreat, saying the strategy will not work there because the city is too small and its coastal property is too expensive. Instead, Del Mar plans to continue to rely on the seawalls and sand replenishment that have held off the ocean in the past.

But the state agency's staffers found the city's proposed adaptation plan to be insufficient because it "does not include the level of detail necessary to address the future impacts of sea level rise."

While the state's report did not specifically say Del Mar's adaptation plan must include managed retreat, residents say the requested modifications are much the same thing. They include additional monitoring of coastal conditions and "triggers" that would require further action by the city.

More than a dozen residents urged the council Monday to stick with the plan as it is. Most of the speakers were long-time property owners such as Robin Crabtree,

whose husband's family has been in Del Mar since the 1920s, but there were also a few newcomers, including former Padres pitcher Trevor Hoffman.

"No changes, no back doors. Please represent us," Hoffman said.

Specific triggers, such as the erosion of a bluff by 10 feet or the removal of the coastal railroad, have long been a sore point with Del Mar residents.

"The whole triggers and monitoring is just emphasizing their attitude that you have to pack up and leave because sea level rise is coming," said Julie Hamilton, an attorney representing the property owners group Del Mar Beach Preservation Coalition

She urged the council to reject all the state agency's proposed modifications.

"This report is designed to set the stage for all the coastal cities in California," Hamilton said. "These are not minor modifications. These are rewriting your (plan) in a way you can't accept."

Del Mar has about 4,400 residents and is San Diego County's smallest city, located entirely in the coastal zone west of Interstate 5. About 600 homes on the northern quarter of the city are built on low-lying property near the beach and the San Dieguito River.

The Coastal Commission's meeting begins at 9 a.m. Oct. 16, the opening of a three-day meeting at the Chula Vista City Council chambers. The Del Mar application is one of the first items on the agenda.

— *Phil Diehl is a reporter for The San Diego Union-Tribune*