

3.1.3. SACO, ME

Population Density	480.6/ sq. mi.
Form of Government	Town
Category	Oceanfront Seasonal
CRS Rating	8

Median Household Income	Median Per Capita Income	% Owner Occ	Population	2000-2010 Pop Growth Rate	% White	% Hispanic	% Minority	% Seasonal Housing
73907	39548	49.6	12529	-0.26	97.6	1%	3.1%	31.6

Adaptations	Status	Incorp orates CC	Type	Impact	Standard Costs	Funding Source
Freeboard - 3 Ft	Implemented	No	Accommodation	Mandatory	Above Required Very Low (< \$1,000)	NOAA
Saco Bay SLR Working Group	In Progress	Yes	Procedural	Recommendation	Unique Medium (<\$100,000)	NOAA
Shoreland Zoning	Implemented	No	Prevention	Mandatory	Above Required Medium (<\$100,000)	State

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POPULATION AND GEOGRAPHY

The city of Saco, located on the southern Maine coast, fronts the Saco Bay. Shaped like an L, its boundaries contain a large inland area on the west where it borders the Town of Buxton. On the north is the town of Scarborough; to its northeast and north is Old Orchard Beach. Its downtown straddles the Saco River across from southern neighbor Biddeford. Saco, along with neighboring towns, has become absorbed in the orbit of the Portland metropolitan area. The town says it,

along with Biddeford, is the banking, retail, service, and manufacturing center of southern Maine.

Saco has a diverse economy, as indicated by its equal emphasis on its beaches, fishing harbor, and high-tech industry and commercial enterprises. This balance has characterized the city for much of its history; it has long been an industrial center, with red brick mills along the Saco River.

The city is located within 20 miles of Portland and, like many of its neighbors, has been growing significantly as development spreads out from the city's center. With a population growth rate of just over 1%, Saco is a fast-growing community and is the third-fastest-growing community in our sample. Population growth has slowed from highs in the 1980s and 1990s. This suburban growth has nearly all taken place in the town's western region, away from the immediate coast.

Despite its being known for the bay of its namesake as a summer resort adjacent to Old Orchard Beach, only 5.1% of Saco's housing stock is for seasonal use.

COASTAL ISSUES

The hazard mitigation plan identifies the four most notable forms of disasters in town as coastal events, specifically hurricanes; major flooding of the Saco river; localized flooding due to intense storms; and wind and ice damage to overhead utility lines (Saco, ME. Hazard Mitigation Plan, p. i).

Saco was an early participant in FEMA's Project Impact hazard mitigation program, which it joined after experiencing significant effects from historic storms such as Hurricane Bob, the October 1992 storm, and a 19-inch rainfall storm in 1996 (p 1).

The city has been active in hazard mitigation and obtained many grants from FEMA over the past 20 years. In 1998, the city won a \$100,000 grant under the Flood Mitigation Assistance Program and reported great results; it participated in the Masters of Disasters program, educating students in the schools; it undertook a \$2.6 million drainage improvement project with \$1.7 million in federal funds in 1998; and it won the Project Impact Star Community award in 2000.

In the section on coastal flooding, sea level rise and increase in storm intensity are mentioned as concerns for the town, particularly the Camp Ellis area.

About 35 homes, one restaurant, a few small businesses, and a pier are vulnerable to damage. The plan states that the most at-risk homes are those on conventional foundations built up against the immediate shoreline, and loss of the frontal dune would put these homes at high risk of loss. Although this has been a problem for over a century, the comprehensive plan says that the problem has been aggravated in the past three decades. Over 30 homes have been lost in that time.” (Saco, Me. Comprehensive Plan 2011, p. 3-6)

Saco City Planner Bob , explained the gravity of the circumstances: “If you lived in southern Maine and there’s a big enough winter or spring storm, then the odds are good that there will be

footage on a local television station of Camp Ellis and the beating it's taking ... If there were going to be a Maine community most in need of taking action to prepare for future storms, it would be Saco" (Personal Communication, Oct. 15, 2012). Saco's coastline is a historic community that remains marine-industry based. The comprehensive plan says that it, "in the face of mounting development pressure in southern Maine, has managed to stay relatively undeveloped." (Comprehensive Plan, p.3-7). The plan recommends commercial development be limited to marine- and tourism-related uses and development in the beach area be limited to small-scale residential uses.

ADAPTATIONS

Sea Level Adaptation Working Group

The Sea Level Adaptation Working Group is a committee comprised of two members from each town in the Saco Bay region—Saco, Biddeford, Old Orchard Beach, and Scarborough.

The group completed a regional action plan in 2011 and it continues to be actively engaged in adaptation in the region. As stated in the action plan, "The purpose of the Sea Level Adaptation Working Group (SLAWG) is to review information from the Coastal Hazard Resiliency Tools Project that has analyzed the problem of sea level rise, to create a Vulnerability Assessment for Saco Bay, and to develop and implement an Action Plan of implementation strategies for regional solutions" (SLAWG Action Plan, p. 1)

The action plan and vulnerability analysis was funded by the Maine State Planning Office & Maine Coastal Program and NOAA. The vulnerability assessment used the best available data from local governments and state and federal agencies to identify buildings, infrastructure, and natural areas vulnerable to storms and sea level rise. Specific goals of the project include providing for public safety, protecting property, protecting the economy, preserving natural features, and promoting efficiency by working together as one region.

Principles of the group include a fair balance between retreat and engineering solutions, setting priorities and ranking projects by using cost-benefit calculations, the number of properties affected, criticality of evacuation routes, the preservation of naturals and recreational values, and the number of people served by that infrastructure.

The implementation strategies and objectives include:

- Use regional approaches to plan for sea level rise, identify funding and obtain grants, and support individual municipalities in support of grants
- Create a ranking process to prioritize and comment on projects
- Comment on coastal policy issues such as dune restoration, beach renourishment, and erosion control
- Recommend standardizing of floodplain management, building code, and shoreland zoning and standardizing review and control of water-based activities across municipalities
- Provide non-binding comments on relevant applications

- Coordinate with stormwater planning
- Coordinate with the New England Finance Center in its research on economic impacts of sea level rise
- Monitor changes to statutes and regulations

3-Foot Freeboard Requirement/Flood Protection Ordinance

Saco is the first municipality in the region to adopt a more stringent freeboard requirement than required by FEMA. The ordinance requires elevation of the structure if work involves greater than 50% of the value.

The change was approved smoothly, with unanimous consent of council members and only one resident speaking in dissent. Town planner Bob Hamblen was quoted as saying, "Coastal homeowners have been receptive of the policy...some really appreciate the city partnering with them in this" (Clean Air Cool Planet, n.d.). Mr. Hamblen attributed the idea and instigation of the ordinance as a result of the research done by the Saco Sea Level Rise Adaptation Working Group. He also said, "In a lot of ways, Saco was the perfect community to consider changes to the floodplain ordinance ... We've seen in very real terms what can happen to structure down at the beach" (Personal Communication, Oct. 15, 2012)