

Florida Trend

The Issues, People and Ideas that Define Florida Business

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Sea Leveling

Miami takes on rising tides.

Experts predict that the Atlantic Ocean will rise two feet by 2060 — putting the western half of Miami Beach under water. Because of the region's porous limestone base, water is expected to rise from underneath the ground as well as in the oceans — so even taller, stronger seawalls won't protect it.

Wayne Pathman, co-founder and managing partner of Miami-based law firm Pathman Lewis, is a land use and environmental lawyer and chairman of the Miami Sea Level Rise Committee and the Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce. Pathman argues that the business community and local governments need to work together to plan for these eventualities.

► **Rising Levels:** "In Miami Beach, we've already experienced flooding from king tide. We get more frequent heavy rainstorms than we have in the past. Sometimes during king tides you can see the water barreling over the sea walls."

► **What's in Store:** "One foot to 2 feet of sea level rise changes nearly everything — such as how the ships at the ports will float. Most of the main causeways to and from Miami Beach — like the MacArthur and Julia Tuttle — are low-lying. (And) it's not just the coastal regions that will be impacted. About 40% of Miami-Dade is still on septic, so those areas will be impacted. (Western Miami-Dade) areas were part of canal systems, with glades



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and marshes, and those don't exist today. Those areas are low-lying and they are all areas that will be impacted."

▶ **Economic Concerns:** "I think the first things you'll see changing are, in the next 10 to 12 years, flood insurance becomes more costly. I think banks will start to charge more and ask for excess insurance (on mortgages they write). Unless there are solutions to infrastructure, in some areas you may not be able to get insurance. And once the sea level has risen, unlike hurricanes, it's constant."

▶ **Solutions:** "We need to put some of those canals back in. We need to learn how to move and store water again. Today, the best solution is to raise roads and raise buildings higher and to not build in high-risk areas that are low-lying."

▶ **Development:** "We continue to build large infrastructure projects throughout the county that don't take into account sea level rise issues, so we're going to be spending more money in the future."

▶ **Government's Role:** "Government practices dealing with zoning and building and developers need to work together. There are potential public-private partnerships to build infrastructure that can contain future flooding and sea level rise. Incentives need to be given to developers. You can't make it just the burden of developers to build differently because they'll build somewhere else. It's not going to happen with one government or the other developers doing it alone."

▶ **Obstacles:** "Gov. Scott does not allocate any resources to dealing with the issue."

▶ **Zoning Changes:** "In Miami Beach, they've raised their base flood elevation from one to five feet — so a developer has the right to build a base five feet higher, and it won't count toward the overall height of the structure."