

# PROJECT VISIONING REPORT

## ATLANTIC COUNTY COASTAL REGION

VENTNOR, MARGATE, LONGPORT, ATLANTIC  
CITY, BRIGANTINE, PLEASANTVILLE,  
NORTHFIELD



RESILIENT 



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Atlantic County Coastal Region (ACCR) undertook a collaborative and inclusive community visioning process to determine how the Region sees itself functioning in the future, and to identify the qualities, objectives, and goals for the Region.

### The ACCR Vision

*The Resilient New Jersey Atlantic County Coastal Region is a resilient and sustainable place where **protections from natural disasters, flooding, and sea level rise** enable the region to thrive; residents' **sense of belonging** and pride in their communities is enhanced by advancing quality of life through fair housing, accessible transportation, infrastructure improvements, and a diversified economy; and visitors are offered inviting recreational and cultural experiences that **honor the ocean and optimize the waterfront, public space, and regional assets that make the region an iconic destination.***

### The ACCR Mission

*Develop a flexible roadmap that looks out to the year 2070 and presents strategic actions and proposed solutions to reduce the worst effects of increased precipitation, sea level rise, and coastal storms over the next 50 years; and ensure the needs and goals of residents, visitors, and businesses of the Atlantic County Coastal Region are heard and incorporated throughout the development and implementation of the Resilient NJ Regional Resilience and Adaptation Action Plan (RRAAP).*

### ACCR's Values

- ❖ **Friendly & inclusive:** welcoming to diverse residents and visitors year-round
- ❖ **A special place in the state, region, and country:** preservation and enhancement of ACCR's unique characteristics – natural and human-made – that set it apart from other destinations
- ❖ **Stronger together:** understanding that the region will continue to experience challenges over time and collaboration leads to greater safety and success
- ❖ **Thriving communities:** numerous economic, educational, and recreational opportunities with a diverse and growing workforce, improved connectivity and mobility, and social equity and environmental justice at the heart of decision-making and investments
- ❖ **Resilience and adaptation:** able to minimize negative effects, manage emergencies, recover rapidly when challenges arise, and rejuvenate over time in the face of climate change

### ACCR's Goals

- 1) **Protect Critical Infrastructure, Ecology and Cultural Assets**
  - a. **Conscientious investment.** Provide infrastructure improvements that create benefits in proportion to the need, considering historical public investment patterns in the region, and without causing displacement.
  - b. **Efficiency and equity.** Ensure response and adaptation strategies to current and future climate change disruptions and damage to infrastructure and communities are efficient and equitable, including infrastructure improvements and nature-based solutions that minimize vulnerability and consequences.
  - c. **Improve regional coordination and build alliances** to share resources and information, access funding, and implement flood resilience measures that drive effective emergency response, promote ecological integrity of local landscapes, and preserve historic and cultural assets of the region.
  - d. **Preserve important plant and animal populations and habitats**, conserve marshlands and wetlands, and promote beneficial reuse of resources (e.g., dredged

materials) to improve viability and biodiversity while reducing impacts of flooding, storm surges, and coastal storms.

## 2) **Protect Residents' Ability to Stay in the Region**

- a. **Innovation in design.** Design critical infrastructure to ensure continued service to all communities during and after major storm events and in the face of rising sea levels and intensifying storms that impact urban and natural landscapes.
- b. **Neighborhood character and features.** Preserve and enhance neighborhood features that represent and are cherished by the people who live here.
- c. **Agility and balance.** Be agile in balancing human needs and limitations in land use, environmental, engineering, policy and funding-related decision-making. Improve local expertise and civic engagement in understanding climate hazards and preparedness strategies and related trade-offs for development and investment.
- d. **Education and collaboration.** Facilitate topical education for residents to empower their input and collaboration on project development, prioritization and outcomes, improve information dissemination and planning for the next flood, and ensure access to safe, equitable and quality resources associated with climate resilience.

## 3) **Diversify Economic, Research, and Employment Opportunities**

- a. **Hyperlocal workforce.** Create hyperlocal workforce development opportunities to support projects and promote small businesses.
- b. **Diversify economy.** Continue to diversify the economy to include additional water-oriented tourist attractions and businesses, as well as offshore renewable energy and strengthen eco-tourism, hospitality, and retail industries.
- c. **Research and development imperatives.** Strengthen research and educational sectors to not only advance innovation, but also improve and expand public awareness of the region's hazards.

The ACCR used a layered process to establish its vision. This included:

- Steering Committee (SC) meetings and Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings
- Reviewing visions & goals from past studies from the ACCR Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)
- Having CAC members fill out a memo of Visioning questions
- Using social media to push surveys with Visioning questions
- Incorporating Visioning into nine (9) Focus Group and Resident Advisory Group meetings
- Holding two Public Events using Poll Everywhere to gather vision and goal feedback
- Distributing informational flyers to community locations to direct people to the website, public meetings, and surveys

In each of these formats, the process started with establishing regional values, included discussion and questions that identified what level of risk the Region would accept, aimed to establish ownership in the visioning process, and considered the balance of social cohesion, the economy, and the environment. The Region identified as a beach-oriented area that embodies all the experiences the Jersey Shore has to offer. The Region indicated that it is unique among Jersey Shore beach communities, given its casinos, entertainment, restaurants, shopping, and a multitude of beach and bay recreational options.

The Region valued being a place where people throughout the State, country, and beyond routinely come to connect – both with each other and with nature. People gather in this Region for conventions,

competitions, pageants, research, collaboration, and innovation. The Region is critical to South Jersey's economy, providing jobs in service, transportation, energy, healthcare, marine, and education sectors. The area values its large employers, and also sees the small businesses as the lifeblood of the Region. The area is rich in ecological resources, and values its marshlands, parks, beaches, and waterways. It is characterized by its diversity of people, destinations, landscapes, activities, and ways of getting around. The Region has continually reinvented itself, and is a place that works together to meet the challenges of the future. The Region is focused on innovation to harness opportunities in green technologies.

Building upon these takeaways, the following general themes emerged:

- ❖ Improve emergency coordination and adapt to sea level rise and changing climate conditions
- ❖ Advance with the times on new technologies, industries, and infrastructure systems
- ❖ Revitalize tourism, leisure, and recreational opportunities along the beach, bays, and transit hubs
- ❖ Diversify economy to include increased focus on climate adaptation and renewable energy

## I. WHY VISIONING?

ACCR is a progressive Region that values its diversity and inclusion, and it is well-positioned to harness new developments in green technologies and the blue economy. The Region is a world-class tourist destination, critical to South Jersey's economy, and rich in ecological resources. The residents recognize the importance of social cohesion, value knowing their neighbors, and place importance on their robust network of community centers and community-based organizations. The Region is focused on emergency preparedness, and it has adapted to withstand and recover from past disasters.

With so many complexities, strengths and vulnerabilities in the Region, it was imperative that the ACCR undertake a collaborative and inclusive community visioning process. The Vision not only identifies how the Region wants to function in the future, but also identifies the qualities, objectives, and goals for the Region.

Project Visioning is intended to identify what is considered important to the Region and how the Region wishes to look and feel in the future. In terms of the RRAAP, the Vision gives direction to prioritization and risk assessment exercises, which will be used to evaluate the success of the selected Resilience and Adaptation Scenarios. The Vision will also ensure that the RRAAP protects those assets that are the most significant and essential to social cohesion, economy, environment, and ecology.

## II. HOW ACCR ESTABLISHED ITS VISION

### a. Methods of Engagement for Project Visioning

A variety of methods were used to engage the public in establishing an inclusive vision statement that equitably reflects the priorities of stakeholders. These methods included reviews of existing plans, meetings with various committees, focus groups, public open houses, email questionnaires and an online survey.

As part of the Planning Context, a review of existing reports and documents was conducted. One of the goals was to understand the missions and visions of municipalities, government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and private enterprises prior to the creation of this Visioning Report. A summary of the Visions from these reports can be found in Chapter 1. Examples of the types of resources reviewed include:

- County and Municipal Master Plans, Updates, & Re-Examination Reports (years vary)
- Coastal Resiliency Institute & Marine Science Center Report (2019)
- Websites of partners and stakeholders including American Red Cross, Atlantic Cape Community College and Stockton University, Sustainable Longport (2020) and Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (2021)
- AtlantiCare Community Needs Assessment (2019)
- NJ Long-Range Transportation Plan 2030 (2008)

Due to concerns with COVID-19, the Resilient NJ ACCR team held virtual meetings with committees and focus groups to gain a better understanding of their thoughts regarding a vision for the region, sustainable infrastructure and future development. These meetings were arranged with an emphasis on hearing the voices of socially vulnerable populations. Of nine (9) focus group meetings about critical assets and visioning, five (5) were held with socially vulnerable groups.



As defined in the Engagement Plan, the engagement strategy is a layered approach that has multiple touchpoints with stakeholders in the Region organized as follows:



- ❖ **Steering Committee (SC):** The Steering Committee comprises at least one member from each of the seven (7) municipalities (Brigantine, Atlantic City, Ventnor, Margate, Longport, Northfield, Pleasantville), at least one member from the County (Atlantic County), one member from a Community Based Organization (the American Red Cross), and one (1) Regional Coordinator, which is an individual that works with all the Steering Committee Members.

**Methods of Engagement with SC for Visioning:** Visioning was an agenda item at the April, May, and June 2021 monthly steering committee meetings; the SC members were asked to complete Visioning Questions in a Visioning Memo; SC Members were invited to two public visioning workshops; and virtual visioning surveys were sent to the SC.

- ❖ **Technical Advisory Committee (TAC):** Consists of leaders that have expertise in these communities on coastal resiliency, disaster response and recovery, economic recovery, transportation, utilities, tourism, coastal engineering, and funding agencies.

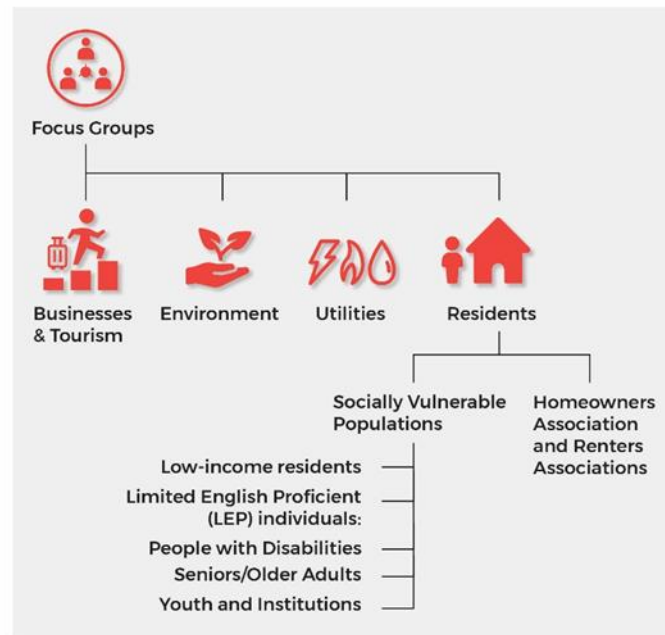
**Methods of Engagement with TAC for Visioning:** Past reports were reviewed, and Visions and Goals compiled in the Planning Context report. Additionally, one-on-one meetings were held with some TAC members to discuss Visioning, including meetings with CRDA and The Nature Conservancy. Multiple members of the TAC were invited to specific focus group meetings.

- ❖ **Community Advisory Committee (CAC):** The CAC comprises diverse community representatives from each of the seven municipalities, Atlantic County, and Community Based Organizations that represent socially vulnerable populations. Several nearby coastal communities that were not part of the original Resilient NJ grant application are included on the CAC, including Egg Harbor Township, Somers Point, Absecon, and Linwood. The CAC members have local knowledge of conditions in their communities during and after natural disasters—in both the short- and long-term, such as emergency response, flooding, crime, job loss, road closures, power shortages, loss of business activity, and infrastructure challenges.

**Methods of Engagement with CAC for Visioning:** Ten (10) CAC meetings were held, one (1) with each of the seven (7) municipalities CACs, one (1) with Atlantic County's CAC, one (1) with the American Red Cross's CAC, and one (1) with the CAC for the neighboring municipalities. Visioning was included in each of these one-on-one meetings. In addition, CAC members were asked to complete visioning questions in a Visioning Memo, invited to two public visioning workshops, and sent a visioning survey to complete online.

- ❖ **Focus Groups (FG)** Consists of members of the communities of Brigantine, Atlantic City, Ventnor, Margate, Longport, Northfield, Pleasantville, and Atlantic County. Focus groups included members of civic associations, business owners, environmental advocates, and utilities staff. There were five (5) focus groups centered on socially vulnerable populations including youth, low-income people, seniors, people with disabilities, and people with Limited English Proficiency.

**Methods of Engagement with FG for Visioning:** Nine (9) “Community Conversations” and/or Focus Group meetings were held, each of which included Visioning. Participants were invited to two public visioning workshops, and a virtual visioning survey was sent to the FGs.



❖ **General Public-** In addition to Group meetings the General Public in the ACCR was also engaged for Visioning.

**Methods of Engagement with General Public for Visioning:** The General Public was invited to two public visioning workshops. These meetings were advertised on the Resilient NJ website, pushed out through social media, advertised in the Press of Atlantic City newspaper, and distributed on flyers in community areas, such as libraries and municipal buildings. The visioning survey was also advertised to the general public using these same methods.

In each of these formats, the process started with establishing regional values and included discussion and questions that identified what level of risk the Region would accept, aimed to establish ownership in the visioning process, and considered the balance of social cohesion, the economy, and the environment.

To determine the regional values of the ACCR, questions were asked of the SC, CAC, Focus Groups, and in the various meetings, memos, polls, and surveys. These questions were:

- How do you see region thriving 50 years from now? What does next 20 years look like?
- What characteristic of the region, if lost would completely change the identity of the region?
- Why do residents choose to live here?
- Why do tourists choose to visit here?
- Why do employees choose to work here?
- What aspects of the region are you proud of?
- Are there distinct and unique identities within the region?



- How often would the region be willing to experience nuisance flooding?
- How often would the region be willing to experience damaging flooding?
- How often would residents and businesses be willing to experience damages to their own property or place of work due to flooding?
- What have been the social and structural effects during and after past disasters (Sandy, Nor'easters, COVID-19 pandemic)? What were the major challenges?
- What were strengths that allowed you to bounce back?
- Do you believe that the diversity of your community will be affected in the future, if so, how?
- Do you anticipate homeowners from adjacent towns might relocate to your town as those areas are increasingly affected by climate change? Might that result in future generations within your community selling or moving away due to raising property values?

Key themes emerged from the responses to these questions, summarized in the following section.

#### **b. The Balance of Social Cohesion, the Economy, and the Environment**

The ACCR Region is proud of its social fabric, diverse economy, and ecological assets. Therefore, throughout the Visioning process discussions often came back to these three (3) sustainability topics. The discussions of community cohesion centered upon residents, visitors, and second-homeowners. The Region is an area where people throughout the state, and beyond, come together for conferences and to reconnect, and there is a mix of year-round residents, second-homeowners, and visitors that come to the region predominantly in the summer when the local population balloons. Many discussions revolved around preserving diversity and the relative opportunity for future generations to live in the region in the face of climate change and gentrification. The Region spoke about the challenges after past disasters on the local economy, and how those effects still ripple through the socially vulnerable communities that rely on the service and tourism industries. There was also discussion on the transition in the beachfront communities, where many residents no longer depend on Atlantic City for employment and some commute to Philadelphia for work, or work remotely altogether. The Region emphasized the importance of the casinos, small businesses, the service industry, the transportation industry, development of the wind power industry, healthcare, the marine industry, and educational and not-for-profit institutions to provide income for residents and a tax base for local governments. The Region also emphasized the importance of environmental resilience. Many of the communities spoke on how they were prepared to live with, and adapt to, rising waters and coastal storms as the area adapts to climate change. The area is rich in ecological resources, and values its marshlands, parks, beaches, and waterways.

### **III. KEY TAKE-AWAYS FROM STAKEHOLDERS**

Stakeholders helped the team obtain a representative sample of perspectives from voices across the ACCR. These stakeholders included residents, business owners, environmental advocates, staff from institutions, youth, socially vulnerable populations, technical experts, and community leaders. The variety of people who provided input through this process created a cross-section of what people within the ACCR want to see change, stay the same, and improve for the future.

The Region identified as a beach-oriented area that embodies all the experiences the Jersey Shore has to offer. Stakeholders indicated that the ACCR is unique among Jersey Shore beach communities, given its boardwalk, casinos, entertainment, restaurants, shopping, marinas, and multitude of beach and bay recreational options. The Region valued that it is a place where people throughout the State, country, and beyond routinely visit to reconnect.

People gather in the ACCR for conventions, competitions, family vacations, pageants, research opportunities, and innovation. The Region is critical to South Jersey's economy, providing jobs in service, transportation, energy, healthcare, marine, aviation, and education sectors. The area values its large employers, and also sees the small businesses as the lifeblood of the ACCR. The area is rich in ecological resources and values its marshlands, parks, beaches, and waterways.

It is characterized by its diversity of people, destinations, landscapes, activities, and ways of getting around. The Region has continually reinvented itself, and it is a resilient place that works together to meet the challenges of whatever comes its way whether it has to do with economic shifts, a pandemic, or a major coastal storm.

The Region found being “resilient” in the ACCR means not only being prepared for and surviving challenges and emergencies, but also adapting and thriving in the face of change. See **Figure 1**. Screenshot of example responses from online survey responses to the question: “What does resilience mean to you?” for a screenshot of responses provided in the ACCR online vision and goals survey with respect to the question: “What does resilience mean to you?”

Meeting conversations, real time polling (“PollEverywhere”) during the Virtual Open House public meetings and survey responses helped to highlight where vulnerabilities and gaps exist in the ACCR’s level of regional resilience as well as what goals are most important as we plan for the future.

**Figure 1.** Screenshot of example responses from online survey responses to the question: “What does resilience mean to you?”

What does resilience mean to you?
The ability to survive and not be too financially disturbed by a natural disaster.
Protecting the island from destruction and ability to rebuild after disasters.
Being able to continue to live along the coast despite climate change and flooding.
Ability to recover quickly and toughness to cope and rebuild.
Surviving then thriving.
the ability to make positive changes for the sake of the environment and the natural resources that this area enjoys. The ability to over rule aggressive plans to "over develop" the open spaces that are remaining.
Personal responsibility to be prepared
Resilience for a community means that the community has an ability to overcome catastrophic events, bounce back or change with the times
Being able to adjust to the changes that may come.
Being able to bounce back no matter what!
The ability to bounce back after a setback.
success over adversity
Resilience refers to the capability to experience a problem and to defend against it and recover from it...
back up and running quickly
Resilience is the ability to bounce back when dealt with adversity.
To withstand
Ability to withstand change which is unavoidable and normal re climate, the economy, cultural behavior etc.
Recovery from a situation that has negatively impacted you or your surroundings.
Being prepared to go on with your life..no matter what happens
Springing back from adversity.
The level of recovery after an event
We can withstand bad things happening, and be strong. It seems like a commonly used socio-political term, used today, which has a negative connotation to me.
preserve life and habitat
The ability to withstand catastrophe
bounce back after weather event
Steadfastness or endurance in the face of less than optimal conditions
Preparation
Ability to attain the 'normal' state soon after an event that caused an abnormal state of affairs.
the ability to withstand or recovery quickly
The ability to adapt.
Ability to adapt to and accommodate changes
Planning to thrive not only survive.
Toughness
An ability to withstand all things that happen, good and not so good. Regenerating and ready for the next challenge.
THE ABILITY TO RECOVER QUICKLY
Capacity to faster Recovery
It means that damages should minimized during times of flooding resulting in less risk to people and infrastructure and ensuring that there is ample room for flooding and river adjustment to occur where the opportunity may exist.
To be able to mentally emotionally cope with a crisis to be prepared
Strengthen and protect natural habitat while maintaining natural resilience. Flexibility to be able to adapt to change.

This included prioritizing protection of critical infrastructure and ecology as well as creating strategies to promote stability and protect residents' ability to remain in the Region in the future (see **Figure 2**). Stakeholders identified key resources and assets that need to be safeguarded and strengthened including roads and evacuation routes, health care facilities and shelters, small businesses, grocery stores, banks, and power, water, and telecommunication utilities.

In addition specific places have been identified as needing improvement in the ACCR's vision for the future including low-laying streets in Margate and Ventnor, portions of Brigantine Boulevard and the vehicular beach access route, West End Avenue and areas around the shoreline of Lakes Bay, among others.

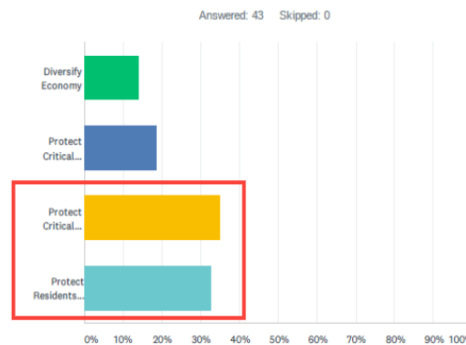
The visioning process highlighted the need to transparently identify, assess and communicate areas of vulnerability and areas in need of protection and enhancement and expand education and awareness about emergency preparedness and planning for resilience and adaptation. Discussion on possible investment and disinvestment in areas across the municipalities within the ACCR was also raised to ensure the Resilient NJ process factors in considerations of gentrification, equity, and access into the risk assessment, scenarios development, and drafting of the ACCR's Action Plan.

Stakeholders identified existing coastal research strengths and willingness to harness green technologies as an opportunity to build on progress of the Stockton

**Figure 2.** PollEverywhere (real time polling) and online survey responses indicating salient goals for Atlantic County Coastal Region stakeholders.

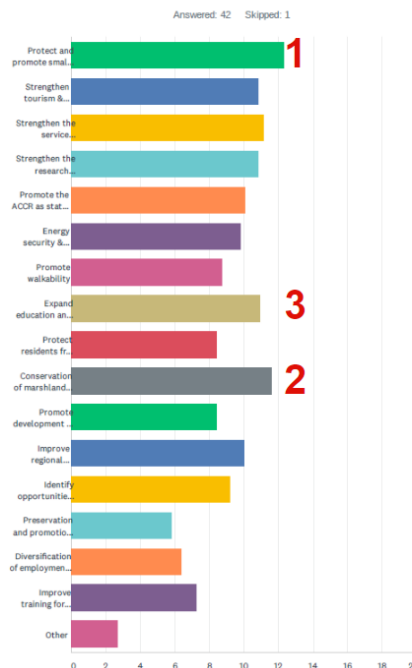
What goals should drive the plan?		AM/PM Votes
High Level Goal	Protect Critical Infrastructure	10
	Protect Residents Ability to Stay in the Region	8
	Diversify Economy	4
	Protect Critical Ecology	4

Q9 Which of these goals is most important to you?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Diversify Economy	13.95%	6
Protect Critical Infrastructure	18.60%	8
Protect Critical Ecology	34.88%	15
Protect Residents Ability to Stay in the Region	32.56%	14
TOTAL		43

Q10 Rank these goals in order of importance:



Protect and promote small business and downtown main streets.

Conservation of marshlands to reduce impact of back bay flooding.

Expand education and awareness about emergency preparedness

University Coastal Research Center and nearby Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve, but also as a way to not only contribute to state, national, and international climate change imperatives related to renewable energy and greenhouse gas emission reductions, but also a means to jumpstart regional research and development, investment, and innovation.

Building upon these take-ways, the following general themes emerged through the course of the first nine months of the Resilient NJ planning process.

- ❖ Resilience, Sustainability, and Adaptation
- ❖ Technological Advancement
- ❖ Travel, Leisure, and Recreation
- ❖ Economic Opportunity

#### a. Resilience, Sustainability, and Adaptation

When asked about resilience, the communities and stakeholders within the ACCR shared experiences of the aftermath of major storms. Most reported that past storms knocked out key infrastructure, including transportation, power, internet and phone communication. There was also discussion on housing that was damaged or destroyed, and resulting loans and bills required to complete repair, replacement, and home-raising costs. Some residents shared they felt ill-equipped to make decisions on how to recover from the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy and believe they will be repaying repair loans for the rest of their lives, which led to discussion on goals for greater transparency, accountability, and knowledge-sharing for navigating decisions, contracts, and investments for mitigating and recovering from flood damage to private property.

The communities recalled that evacuation routes were rendered inadequate or were not usable before and after the storm due to flooding, debris, and/or congestion. Though the ACCR persevered and ultimately rebuilt, residents offered short-term and long-term suggestions, including to raise key evacuation roads, improve coordination and communication among emergency services, and organize a regional debris removal strategy to increase the barrier island's ability to be better prepared and recover more quickly in the future.

Some residents found that public outreach, specifically being available in multiple languages, was lacking before storms like Superstorm Sandy. There were also challenges with training to evacuate those with disabilities and special needs, particularly with respect to autism and the aging population. Conflicting messages from local and state leaders and the remembrance of past experiences (e.g., calls to evacuate for storms that ultimately did not result in damage) have influenced some individuals' decisions to not evacuate in the future. The focus groups and interviews also found that some residents, such as individuals without housing and undocumented residents did not feel safe or were otherwise unwilling or unable to ask for assistance. When it came to rebuilding, there were also unscrupulous contractors that preyed on the vulnerable. Costs for raising houses and damage repairs became out-of-reach for some homeowners, leading them to abandon their properties altogether. Some of the abandoned homes were secondary summer homes ineligible for some of the same funding opportunities available to primary homes for rebuilding or repair. At the same time, the ACCR also witnessed an increase in homelessness after the storms.

Other short-term post-disaster challenges included debris management, power outages, and flooding. Superstorm Sandy washed sand onto streets and into sanitary and storm sewer systems, which damaged infrastructure, including underground pipes.

After Superstorm Sandy, most of the communities in ACCR adopted a “code red” system to warn residents to evacuate on time. Communities also increased outreach regarding the [Register Ready](#) program that allows individuals to register with special needs so that emergency responders can provide appropriate services in times of need. Municipalities focused on strategies for elevating houses and roads. An influx of public funding after Sandy paid for critical infrastructure upgrades.

The coastal communities are continually adapting to climate change, especially rising sea levels along the barrier islands and bayside marshes. To reduce flood risk and its related consequences, some stormwater pump stations and backup generators have been added in the region; dune, marsh, and beach replenishment has continued; and bulkhead projects have been built to act as a first line of defense. Stakeholders also identified that raising major roads may be necessary in some areas but will present a challenge in others as connections to surrounding properties must be maintained within the limited available space in these built-out areas.

Evolution of the ACCR’s awareness, understanding, and development of regional sustainability, resilience and adaptation is also reflected by the New Jersey Economic Development Authority and Stockton University’s identification of Atlantic City and broader Absecon Island as an ideal location for a laboratory and innovation hub focused on coastal resilience research and development. The Coastal Resiliency Institute & Marine Science Center would provide cutting edge research in off-shore wind energy, the blue economy, resilience, and sea level studies. This facility is at the top of Stockton’s capital improvements initiatives.

The larger region has also been identified as an excellent place for off-shore wind deployment. These developments are part of the ACCR’s resilience story, in which microgrids, reuse of dredged material, an eco-park, large scale solar projects, and green hydrogen have also been raised as components of the vision for a resilient future.

## **b. Technological Advancement**

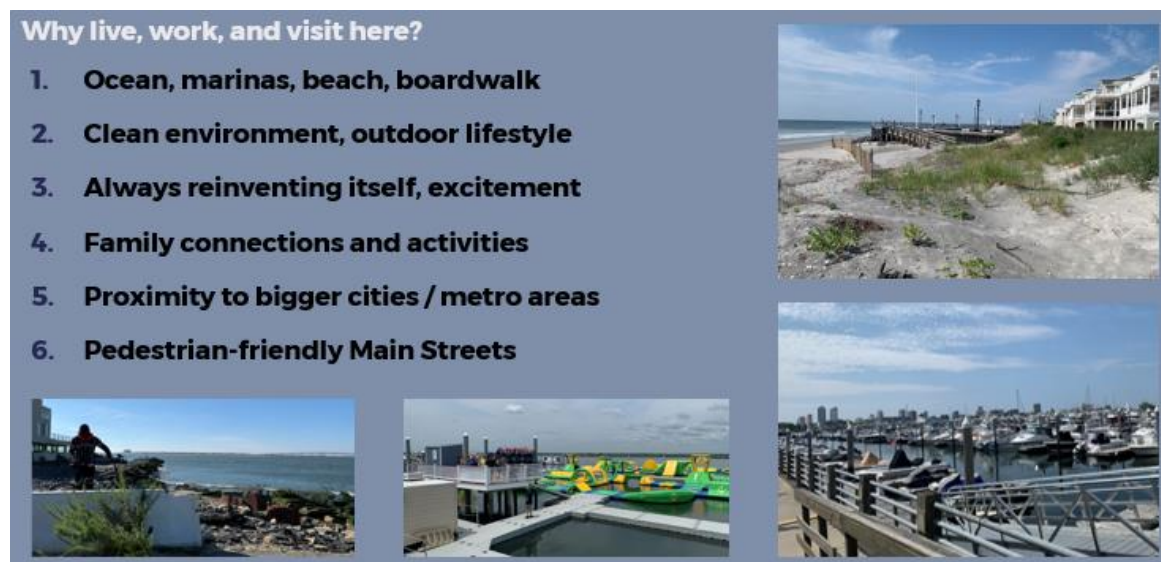
As a component for achieving a more resilient future, technological advancement in wind power, green technologies, and climate science is important to stakeholders, as identified through visioning discussions. The SC and CAC repeatedly discussed the ‘Blue Economy’ as an opportunity for advancing wind energy and marine industries while providing greater access to more affordable and reliable energy in the region. Utility companies and CAC members suggested renewable energy combined with microgrids could reduce electricity shortages during storms and speed up recovery.

The operation and maintenance facilities for Ørsted and Atlantic Shores will be in Atlantic City. These facilities will comprise multimillion-dollar investments on the waterfront. The Atlantic Cape Community College received a grant to build a wind power safety training center. The college also applied for a grant to begin a turbine technician training center with the support of unions and elected officials. Stockton has memorandums of understanding with Ørsted and Atlantic Wind to do water research and testing. Research and workforce development are key goals for the ACCR as a result of these technological advancements.



The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is also spurring technological advancement, with Embry Riddle Aeronautical University (ERAU) agreeing to serve as an academic partner in the development of an operational plan for an Atlantic County Aviation Maintenance and Technical Academy. In 2018, the Atlantic County government and Atlantic County Economic Alliance (ACEA) were awarded a \$120,000 Innovation Challenge grant from NJEDA to develop a plan for the academy. A key goal of the proposed Atlantic County academy is to help broaden and diversify the regional economy to facilitate development of an aviation economic hub centered around the FAA Tech Center, the Atlantic City Airport, and the National Aviation Research and Technology Park.

*Figure 3. Summary of responses from online survey to the question: "Why do people live, work, and visit here?"*



### c. Travel, Leisure, and Recreation

The tourism and hospitality sectors make up a core part of the local economy. This includes general travel (transportation and relevant services), leisure (beaches, hotels, and supporting facilities), and recreation (casinos, boardwalks, aquatic activities, etc.). Focus groups and committees expressed pride in the tourism and hospitality sectors that are vital to Atlantic City's economy. Many of the region's residents are drawn to Atlantic City and surrounding communities due to the world-class beaches, boardwalk, and nightlife. Participants recalled fond memories of seeing the boardwalks of Atlantic City full of summer tourists and working in the casinos and restaurants that catered to tourists.

A sizable number of stakeholders in the ACCR work in the casinos and businesses in Atlantic City as their livelihoods. The industry has provided jobs and household income to an area that relies heavily on tourism to fuel its economy. Nearly every group knew people who currently work in or had worked for a business in Atlantic City. The city is a host to events and conventions that attract out of town visitors, such as the Miss America Pageant, an event that proudly originated in the city. The Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) indicated that some of the vacant lots that it owns within the city will be converted to surface parking-lots for special events like the 2021 Atlantic City Airshow.



ACCR stakeholders shared feeling a connection to the surrounding water, beaches, and nature and expressed a desire to focus on these critical assets. The overall health of the marshes was highlighted by stakeholders for bay recreation like watersports and boating. In addition, stakeholders envision improving transportation assets in and around the ACCR to protect accessibility to jobs, tourism and recreation opportunities. They suggested raising the major bridges and roadways leading into the islands, dredging the back bay area for flood resistance, and protecting the rail line and Atlantic City International Airport from flooding. The loss of power in past disasters had a negative effect on jobs when large employers like the casinos in Atlantic City and small businesses along the coast went without power and could not open to the public.

#### d. Economic Opportunity

Representatives of local small business owners, major casinos, the hospital, the airport, utilities, institutions, and commercial ventures in the ACCR participated in focus groups, public meetings, and surveys. The range of commodities and services these different businesses represent reflect the diversity in opportunities within the ACCR. CRDA spoke about how high paying engineering and technical jobs with good benefits at organizations like NASA and Boeing would attract talent into the Region. CRDA was in favor of further supporting the “Blue Economy” and incentives to increase homeownership within Atlantic City and the Region.

Utility companies operating within the ACCR were interviewed in a focus group. They discussed cooperation on maintaining and repairing critical infrastructure would be mutually beneficial for the residents and companies. Such cooperation would create redundancy on the utility grid, allowing utilities to stay online or to resume operation more quickly following major storms. The faster services return, the more quickly the economy can restart after a storm. To avoid disruption to the economy stakeholders also raised the opportunity for having preparedness programs and tabletop response drills incorporated into regional planning and coordination as part of increasing future resilience.

## IV. SUMMARY OF VISIONING EXERCISES

### a. Social

Community cohesion was a key theme of the CAC meetings. Stakeholders said that this is an area where people throughout the state and beyond came together for conferences and to connect. The region is a mix of tourists and visitors, second homeowners and year-round residents. CAC members stressed the importance of preserving diversity and allowing multiple generations to stay in the area as it evolves. The municipalities expressed a desire to attract additional year-round populations.

Residents, particularly year-round residents, desired transparency and clear communication from local officials during emergencies. The residents indicated their desire to continue to live and work within these unique and diverse communities. The ACCR has embodied the natural beauty and cultural identity of the shore for generations, and it is an area where people know and help their neighbors and work together to adapt when facing challenges. Residents voiced a need for consistent regional communication that reaches all populations and considers language barriers. Leaders are coordinating to address short- and long-term social challenges, like establishing temporary shelters, safeguarding supply chains and transportation access, and creating a culture of preparedness in the region. Additionally, stakeholders raised other complex challenges the ACCR wants to guard against or manage better in future disasters, like

unscrupulous contractors taking advantage of residents, onboarding and management of volunteers, providing adequate resources and services for coping with the mental health effects in the aftermath of climate events, homelessness, and abandoning of homes and properties.

b. **Economic**

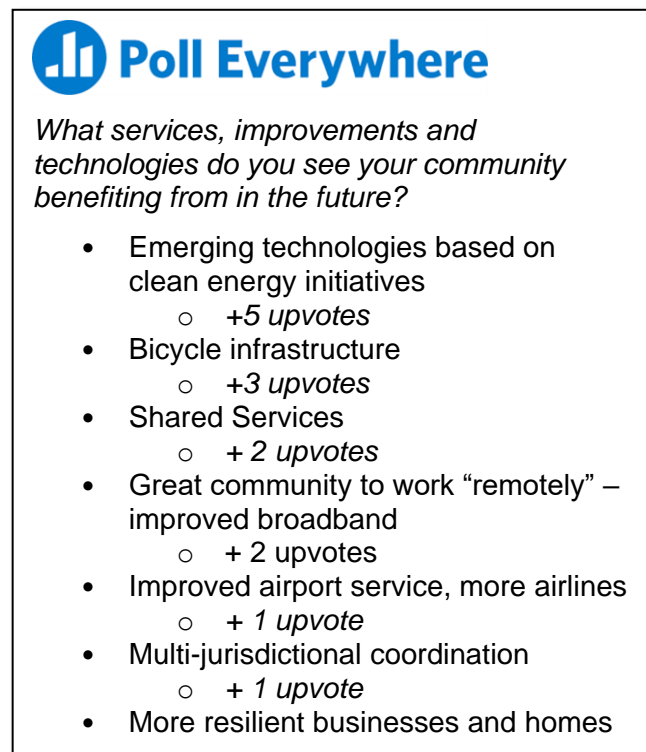
The ACCR stakeholders value their historic boardwalk, world-class beaches and bays, vibrant casinos, and large-scale conventions and events, which are all sources of income for the economy. The stakeholders wish to preserve their tourism economy and build upon it with innovation and growth in the blue economy, aviation, wind power, healthcare, and institutional sectors. The Region wishes to remain a world class tourist destination, with casinos, entertainment, conventions and events, restaurants, shopping, and a multitude of beach and bay recreational options, while preserving quiet residential neighborhoods and the small-town feel and character of the Region's Main Streets.

As seen in **Figure 4**, participants in the Virtual Open House real-time polling exercise saw emerging technologies based on clean energy initiatives and other quality of life improvements (including bicycle infrastructure, shared services, and more resilient homes and businesses) as opportunities that would benefit the ACCR in the future. The theme of improving day-to-day economic and social stability as a part of improving short- and long-term resilience was raised repeatedly through the visioning process.

In the aftermath of major events, the ACCR realizes the importance of getting critical infrastructure back in service as quickly as possible for the local economy. Therefore, regional debris management coordination and the need for emergency contracts is key, as well as protecting and elevating evacuation routes and transportation infrastructure. There also needs to be reliable power, and coordination for all critical utilities including internet, phone, power, water, and sewer. Stakeholders voiced the need to protect and design critical infrastructure to withstand floodwater in a way that it can come and go, such as fortifying roads and subsurface utility lines and installing stormwater pump stations and valves on outfalls.

As the economy of the ACCR diversifies, stakeholders also envision workforce training as part of the region's future so residents can transfer skills and be prepared for jobs in wind power, aviation, healthcare, climate adaptation, and other emerging industries. The addition of jobs in these industries along with existing residents support small businesses, retail, restaurants, and casinos as well as the local tax base.

*Figure 4. Real-time polling results from 6/15/21 Virtual Open House (morning) on what could benefit the ACCR in the future.*



### c. Environmental

The ACCR accepts that it must learn to live with rising waters as the coastal areas adapt to climate change. The ACCR supports research and investment in the blue economy and ecosystem services for promoting sustainable energy and long-term resilience. The area is rich in ecological resources, and values its marshlands, parks, beaches, and waterways. The conservation of marshlands is of key importance to the ACCR along with management of erosion and sediment transport, particularly in Brigantine and Longport. The ACCR supports both structural and non-structural solutions to flooding and discussed examples where marshlands were more effective than bulkheads in certain locations. The ACCR values its parks, trees, and green infrastructure and sees itself on the cutting edge of green technologies and nature-based solutions.

## V. THE FINAL VISION, MISSION AND GOALS

### a. The Vision Statement

In conclusion, the final Vision Statement of the ACCR is as follows:

*The Resilient New Jersey Atlantic County Coastal Region is a resilient and sustainable place where **protections from natural disasters, flooding, and sea level rise** enable the region to thrive; residents' **sense of belonging** and pride in their communities is enhanced by advancing quality of life through fair housing, accessible transportation, infrastructure improvements, and a diversified economy; and visitors are offered inviting recreational and cultural experiences that **honor the ocean and optimize the waterfront, public space, and regional assets that make the region an iconic destination.***

### b. The Mission Statement

The final Mission of the ACCR is as follows:

*Develop a flexible roadmap that looks out to the year 2070 and presents strategic actions and proposed solutions to reduce the worst effects of increased precipitation, sea level rise, and coastal storms over the next 50 years; and ensure the needs and goals of residents, visitors, and businesses of the Atlantic County Coastal Region are heard and incorporated throughout the development and implementation of the Resilient NJ Regional Resilience and Adaptation Action Plan (RRAAP).*

### c. ACCR Values & Goals

The values and goals of the ACCR are as follows:

- **Friendly & inclusive:** welcoming to diverse residents and visitors year-round
- **A special place in the state, region, and country:** preservation and enhancement of ACCR's unique characteristics – natural and human-made – that it set it apart from other destinations
- **Stronger together:** understanding that the region will continue to experience challenges over time and collaboration leads to greater safety and success
- **Thriving communities:** numerous economic, educational, and recreational opportunities with a diverse and growing workforce, improved connectivity and

mobility, and social equity and environmental justice at the heart of decision-making and investments

- **Resilience and adaptation:** able to minimize negative effects, manage emergencies, recover rapidly when challenges arise, and rejuvenate over time in the face of climate change

### ACCR Goals

#### 1) **Protect Critical Infrastructure, Ecology and Cultural Assets**

- a. **Conscientious investment.** Provide infrastructure improvements that create benefits in proportion to the need, considering historical public investment patterns in the region, and without causing displacement.
- b. **Efficiency and equity.** Ensure response and adaptation strategies to current and future climate change disruptions and damage to infrastructure and communities are efficient and equitable, including infrastructure improvements and nature-based solutions that minimize vulnerability and consequences.
- c. **Improve regional coordination and build alliances** to share resources and information, access funding, and implement flood resilience measures that drive effective emergency response, promote ecological integrity of local landscapes, and preserve historic and cultural assets of the region.
- d. **Preserve important plant and animal populations and habitats,** conserve marshlands and wetlands, and promote beneficial reuse of resources (e.g., dredged materials) to improve viability and biodiversity while reducing impacts of flooding, storm surges, and coastal storms.

#### 2) **Protect Residents' Ability to Stay in the Region**

- a. **Innovation in design.** Design critical infrastructure to ensure continued service to all communities during and after major storm events and in the face of rising sea levels and intensifying storms that impact urban and natural landscapes.
- b. **Neighborhood character and features.** Preserve and enhance neighborhood features that represent and are cherished by the people who live here.
- c. **Agility and balance.** Be agile in balancing human needs and limitations in land use, environmental, engineering, policy and funding-related decision-making. Improve local expertise and civic engagement in understanding climate hazards and preparedness strategies and related trade-offs for development and investment.
- d. **Education and collaboration.** Facilitate topical education for residents to empower their input and collaboration on project development, prioritization and outcomes, improve information dissemination and planning for the next flood, and ensure access to safe, equitable and quality resources associated with climate resilience.

#### 3) **Diversify Economic, Research, and Employment Opportunities**

- a. **Hyperlocal workforce.** Create hyperlocal workforce development opportunities to support projects and promote small businesses.
- b. **Diversify economy.** Continue to diversify the economy to include additional water-oriented tourist attractions and businesses, as well as offshore renewable energy and strengthen eco-tourism, hospitality, and retail industries.
- c. **Research and development imperatives.** Strengthen research and educational sectors to not only advance innovation, but also improve and expand public awareness of the region's hazards.