CASE STUDY

IEP CATEGORY – PLACE

North Carolina State University: Princeville – Coastal Dynamics Design Lab
**ABOUT THE PRINCEVILLE AND COASTAL DYNAMICS DESIGN LAB PARTNERSHIP**

Since its founding as Freedom Hill in 1865, the Town of Princeville, North Carolina has survived the violence of Reconstruction, the institutionalized discrimination of Jim Crow, the destructive forces of urban renewal programs, and multiple devastating floods. Resilience has long characterized this community. Princeville’s vulnerability to flood waters, even with a three-mile earthen levee in place, has prompted recommendations that the entire community relocate. However, its irreplaceable, place-based history makes this an impossible proposition.

Princeville is undergoing a multi-year, and what has become a multi-generational, post-flood recovery process overseen by state and federal agencies. Current rebuilding efforts are a result of Hurricane Matthew, which made landfall in the Carolinas on October 8, 2016. The Category 1 hurricane dropped 20+ inches of rain across much of eastern North Carolina. In Princeville, water from the Tar River breached its banks and bypassed the levee that surrounds the town. When the water receded two weeks later, 80% of Princeville had been flooded. Including the destruction caused by Hurricane Matthew, Princeville has been devastated by floods eight times since its charter in 1885 (1887, 1919, 1924, 1923, 1940, 1958, 1999, and 2016). This history of flooding has left long-lasting imprints across Princeville’s community landscape. Despite its flood-prone past, Princeville citizens have always returned to rebuild and reclaim their rightful place in history as “The Oldest Town Chartered by Blacks in America.” In the words of one Town Commissioner, “I feel like it would be a slap in the face (to town founders) for us to up and run.” Each flood has resulted in dramatic changes to Princeville; streets which were historically dense with houses and businesses now only show faint traces of the vibrant hub that once existed as lots sit vacant and homes unoccupied.

**GOALS AND PURPOSE**

The partnership with Princeville is increasing social and physical resilience, specifically through deploying land use strategies that reduce flood risk, recognize and respond to capacity gaps, and improve public safety, environmental awareness, and long-term ecological function within historically flood-prone areas. The purpose
is to inform, organize, and facilitate the ongoing planning, design, and implementation of communal greenspaces that mitigate localized flood risks, sustainably manage stormwater, and create social and recreational uses.

Approximately 87% of Princeville’s total land area is mapped within the 100-year floodplain of the Tar River. Rather than presuming an expanded levee will universally solve Princeville’s flooding issues, our partnership recognizes that flooding is a natural and oftentimes uncontrollable process that should be expected to occur on a cyclical basis. Acknowledging natural cycles creates opportunities to proactively implement new land planning practices and techniques that enable Princeville’s residents to live with floodwaters more safely and symbiotically.

**OUTCOMES**

This partnership fills critical technical gaps in the recovery process. The federal and state mitigation programs that are offered to residents after floods are specifically designed to relocate people and their homes out of floodplains, resulting in checkerboarded vacant landholdings. The lack of a plan for the active reuse of vacant parcels, whether they result from government-backed mitigation programs or through abandonment, has created a critical need to address vacancy in Princeville’s historic core as a way of building toward a more resilient community. Furthermore, the recent announcement of federal funds to finance a levee improvement project for Princeville does not address the existing vacancy issues. As a legally binding component of the mitigation programs offered to residents through the years, many of the town’s vacant parcels now have land use restrictions attached to their deeds that never again allow for placement of built structures. The only option that remains for these properties is to be repurposed through contextually sensitive and community-responsive open space management techniques. To achieve these outcomes, the technical assistance and resources provided by the Coastal Dynamics Design Lab (CDDL) to Princeville align mitigation policies, legal and programmatic uses, and the natural and built environments of Princeville. These results have led to tangible change related to transitioning vacant, abandoned, and town- or county-owned properties into unique open spaces that create new, beneficial uses to better serve the public good. In doing so, these projects serve to promote a more flood-ready and attractive Town of Princeville.

The primary benefits of focusing land planning strategies around a succinct set of policies and a unified, actionable plan are:

1) individual plans and projects are developed under a cohesive, consistent, and co-
created vision

ii) clearly defined community goals build knowledge, consensus, and capacity across individuals and groups.

The six-year effort continues to create a narrative of long-term community resilience centered on the concepts of conservation, cultivation, and wetland connections. These categories strategically align with FEMA-approved land uses that regulate how parcels can be used post-buyout. Nested within each of these thematic areas are specific projects that focus on the repurposing of vacant, vulnerable, and underutilized parcels that all fit within a consolidated plan. All efforts also align and incorporate social and economic networks with projects and programs by immediate-, near-, and long-term initiatives. Together, this approach provides town officials and respective project partners with a framework capable of navigating the fluid, ever-changing conditions of recovery. More than a single static plan, the engagement with the Town of Princeville has operationalized customized, highly adaptive strategies for repurposing vacant and/or buyout properties into natural infrastructure assets.

The partnership has attracted more than $750K in direct-to-community grant awards to implement foundational projects. Legal agreements have also been developed that allow residents to lease adjacent, vacant parcels to expand their home landscapes and assist with maintenance, and enable local entrepreneurs, NGOs, and faith-based groups to lease lots to create incubator farms and/or community garden spaces. Initial projects are developing the first phases of the townwide Heritage Trail and implementing a series of rain gardens, bioretention devices, and associated educational signage at the recently repaired Princeville Elementary School.

This collective effort contributes to the growing body of post-disaster recovery work that is simultaneously serving Princeville and acting as a model for rural resiliency and recovery work across North Carolina and the U.S.

ABOUT APLU

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is North America’s oldest higher education association. APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and
advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The association's membership consists of public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations.

APLU’s mission is to: expand access and improve student success to deliver the innovative workforce of tomorrow; advance and promote research and discovery to improve society, foster economic growth, and address global challenges; and build healthy, prosperous, equitable, and vibrant communities locally and globally.

Based in Washington, DC, the association’s work is furthered by an active and effective advocacy arm that works with Congress and the administration as well as the media to advance federal policies that strengthen public universities and benefit the students they serve.

ABOUT THE IEP UNIVERSITIES PROGRAM

APLU and its Commission on Economic and Community Engagement (CECE) established the Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) Universities Program to help higher education institutions codify, elevate, and advance their campus enterprise supporting economic and community development.

The IEP designation program recognizes institutions that have demonstrated a meaningful, ongoing and substantial commitment to economic and community development, growth, and economic opportunity.

The IEP awards program recognize exemplary and innovative projects in university-based economic and community engagement:

- **Talent** and workforce development
- **Innovation**, entrepreneurship, and tech-based economic development
- **Place** development through public service, outreach, and community engagement

Learn more at: [www.APLU.org/IEP](http://www.APLU.org/IEP)