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AIA-PECONIC POSITION PAPER No.2: CHANGE THE WIND ZONE TO THE UNPROTECTED COASTAL FIRST HALF-MILE

To the Editor:

As members of the American Institute of Architects - Peconic Chapter, we think that the inclusion of our region *entirely* within the 120 MPH wind zone is a gross oversimplification of conditions on the ground. We have written to the New York State Fire Prevention and Building Code Council proposing the following conservative but critical change:

The present wind zone classifications should be amended to define a Coastal Zone for the 120MPH/3 Second Gust for structures within the first half mile of the ocean, and to include structures within the second half mile only if they are not protected by woods, hills or man-made structures.

If a building is next to woods, hills or land with built-up, man-made structures, it is protected and should not have to be strengthened to protect against high winds. Much of our region has woods, hills or man-made structures, or is otherwise naturally protected from the ocean. Shelter Island is a prime example. Despite this fact, the way we traditionally build on Long Island already substantially exceeds many of the lightweight construction standards typical in Florida, where results of Hurricane Andrew spurred the adoption of this Code. The Code is supposed to take our conditions here into account, but instead, it merely identifies the Coastal Wind Zone in our region as a broad, unified and wide open unprotected area.

While being overzealous in its regulation of wind zone classification, New York's Building Code under regulates the threat of water. The Gulf Coast storms - Katrina *et. al.* - demonstrated the very powerful effect of the coastal surge in hurricanes. For many of us on the East End, these storms were reminiscent of the damage wrought here by the great hurricane of 1939, as well as that of Hurricane Carol in 1954. Coastal surge can make structural or constructional changes meaningless, since in such large wind storms, vulnerable structures have been critically damaged or even wiped away by wind-driven water.

Such destruction is a grave, real threat but is far beyond what the wind zone standards are meant to address. The fact that the 120 MPH wind zone designation is the highest in the continental US does not protect the public from such extreme

threats from
similarly wind-
driven *water*
conditions. To
provide this
protection,
coastal
construction
itself needs to
be addressed
in the Building
Code.

Again, our July letter to the Residential Code of New York State Technical Subcommittee has met with limited response. In the meantime, we note that the NYS State Residential Building Code is about to be reissued, amended this year. We have been told that the comment period for current revisions has ended and that our position will not be examined until the opening of the next round of revision comments held prior to the reissuance of the Code again in approximately three years, c. 2012. We hope that publishing of this letter will help inform members of the public and will lead to their support for more timely action.

A copy of our Position Letter - which addresses other issues in the Code - and contact information may be found on our website: <http://AIAPeconic.org>.

Very truly yours,

Stephen A. Lesser, AIA
Chairman, AIA Peconic Chapter Codes Committee