



How Cities are Preparing for Climate Gentrification: A Case Study of South St. Petersburg Florida



Anthony Milordis and Calla Curry

Department of Urban and Regional Planning, *Florida State University*, Tallahassee, FL

Introduction

South St. Petersburg is a low socioeconomic and minority neighborhood in St. Petersburg, Florida. We posit that when the immediate impacts of climate change become more apparent in St. Petersburg, such as flooding, sea level rise, tropical storms, and subsequent high insurance costs, those living near the more expensive coastal areas will migrate inland towards areas that are less vulnerable to climate change related impacts, such as the South St. Pete area. An influx of migration from more affluent areas may drive up the cost of living in the area, effectively pricing out longtime residents. The aim of this study is to determine how this process, referred to as climate gentrification, is being perceived by officials working in and around housing in St. Pete.

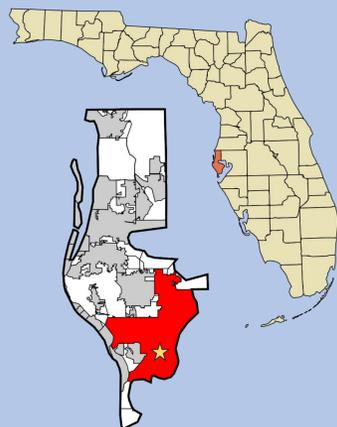
Methods

- Reached out to officials working in and around housing in South St. Petersburg, finding new participants via snowball sampling
 - City of St. Petersburg Planning Department
 - Non-Profit Organizations involved in affordable housing
 - Community Redevelopment Area Officials
 - County and City Housing Administrators
- Conducted interviews lasting about an hour in length over zoom
- Posed open ended questions focusing on how officials are addressing climate change and gentrification in South St Pete
- Performed content analysis on responses from interviews, focusing on key themes and ideas shared by participants

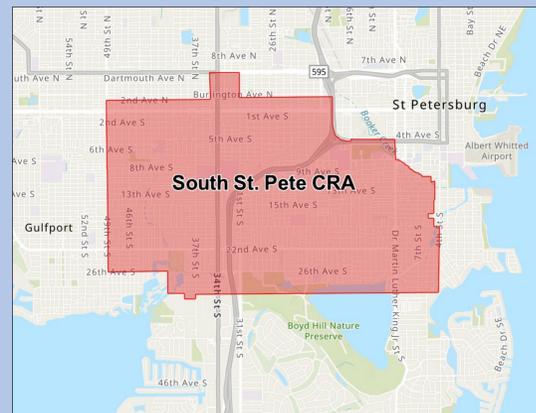


Image obtained from Fox13 Tampa Bay

Flooding in St. Petersburg



■ : St. Petersburg
★ : South St. Petersburg
Map obtained from Wikipedia



South St. Pete Community Redevelopment Area
Map created by Calla Curry

Results

- Agreement among officials that the South St. Petersburg neighborhood is gentrifying**
 - Limited land availability
 - Individuals moving to Pinellas/St. Pete from other areas
 - Agreement that Pinellas has an affordable housing crisis
 - This affordability crisis appears to be what is motivating action, rather than concern over climate migration specifically
 - St. Pete has a robust policy arena for the creation of affordable housing, but can't keep up with demand
- Interviewees have not indicated that they have seen climate migration occurring**
 - Could be because displacement is difficult to track, but lack of even anecdotal evidence
- Actions have been taken to increase density allowances in the coastal high hazard area to take pressure off low-income neighborhoods located more inland.**
 - Reducing climate migration appears to be the intent of this policy change
 - This increase in density comes with the caveat that buildings must be built to be more resilient
 - However, whether this has had the intended effect is unclear. This shows that some action has been taken, albeit possibly with mixed results

Background

- Literature on climate gentrification indicates that forces like rising insurance costs and general concern for safety may cause coastal residents to migrate to higher elevations within the same city
- This migration could increase the cost of living in receiving communities, pricing out current residents

Why South St. Pete was chosen:

- The neighborhood sits at a higher elevation outside of the coastal high hazard area, making it a potential receiving community
- Low socioeconomic markers and a high proportion of renters leave residents vulnerable to displacement and gentrification
- The city sits on a peninsula with no space to build outward, increasing housing market pressures

Discussion

The most significant finding seems to be a lack of concern about climate gentrification. Interviewees were largely aware of the concept but did not witness it impacting this area. Still, officials indicated that affordable housing is a top priority. There is widespread agreement that the neighborhood is changing, and residents are vulnerable to displacement.

In recent years, the city increased density allowances in the coastal high hazard area. This could potentially alleviate the effects of climate gentrification, as it enables the creation of more resilient housing near the coast. However, officials expressed doubt that these measures have been effective in curbing displacement in South St. Pete. When asked about what measures are effective, they pointed to examples of the city's robust housing policy arena, such as the recent allowance of accessory dwelling units.

Generally, it seemed that there was limited collaboration between those working on housing, and those setting climate change related standards. Our findings indicate a need for greater awareness of how climate change and housing costs interact at the local level in St. Petersburg. Additionally, future research is needed to better understand how climate gentrification might impact cities across Florida.

References

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