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MILITARY'S EXAMPLE CAN GUIDE HISTORIC PRESERVATION

NEW RESEARCH FROM HISTORY, BUSINESS PROFESSORS.

by [Jim Hanchett](#) | April 30, 2021*Above: Sheri Shuck-Hall (left) and Thomas Hall**Read time: about 2 min*

Innovative practices used by the U.S. military to counter climate change offer useful lessons for policymakers and preservationists, according to new research.

Dr. Thomas Hall of the [Luter School of Business](#) and Dr. Sheri Shuck-Hall of the [Department of History](#) say those lessons can be especially useful in the communities such as those surrounding Christopher Newport where there is a large military presence and where the effects of climate change are threatening historic structures and challenging planners.

Their most recent paper, "Adapting Military Resilience Strategies to Historic Preservation," was selected for a keynote panel presentation at the National Forum for Historic Preservation, a highly competitive venue featuring academic speakers and selected planning officials from around the country. This year, the conference was sponsored by the Tulane University School of Architecture.

"The climate is changing and will continue to do so, which will impose costs that should be incorporated into historic preservation policies across the United States," Hall said. "Military base commanders view climate change as a 'force multiplier' and have used mitigation strategies that can in turn be applied to civilian settings, especially in areas such as Hampton Roads or Annapolis, Maryland, where the importance of heritage-based tourism accompanies substantial military infrastructure."

These strategies include:

- Relocating houses in the path of floodwaters
Hall and Shuck-Hall point to examples of structures being demolished rather than moved and suggest flood planning include the consideration of moving historic buildings to safer ground.
- Adaptive re-use of existing structures
This is almost always the “greenest” option, because new construction invariably has a higher carbon footprint than modification of existing houses, museums and office buildings.
- Elevating historic structures where they stand.
While care must be taken to preserve their appearance, buildings can be lifted rather than moved or torn down. Charleston, South Carolina provides excellent examples of how elevated structures can maintain curb appeal.
- Dikes, seawalls and wetlands expansion.
Landscape elements such as those used in Holland and by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers could make historical districts and structures more resilient.

Using a hypothetical seawall as an example, Hall said the long-term savings that come from flood prevention can dwarf the construction costs. Base commanders have adopted sophisticated tools for that sort of cost-benefit analysis but not just the money matters. Hall points to the city of Hampton, Virginia, and its effort to weigh historical legacies and cultural traditions in comparisons of climate mitigation costs and benefits.

“Because climate change entails risks other than flooding – such as drought, wildfires and thawing permafrost – protection from encroaching water is only one element of a comprehensive strategy to deal with the effects of climate change on historic preservation,” said Shuck-Hall.

That leads to their recommendation for further education so that more Americans are aware of the multi-billion-dollar annual impact of the release of greenhouse gases on the climate. Slowing, stopping or reversing climate change is the best strategy for historic preservation in the long run.

Hall is an associate professor of economics and finance and also serves as the associate director of Christopher Newport’s [Public History Center](#). Shuck-Hall is a professor of history and director of the Public History Center.
